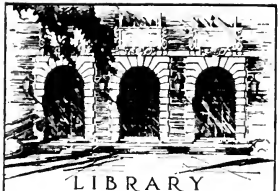

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR

A Novel.

BY

AUSTIN CLARE

AUTHOR OF "THE CARVED CARTOON," ETC.

"*Is the belief in an unconquerable Fate—an inexorable doom pursuing its victim from father to son—compatible with a creed whose God is Love? To think so were to hold a religion essentially pagan, for all its thin veil of Christianity—like that which in Brittany baptized the heathen menhirs, and built a Calvary over the place where human victims had been offered to the ruthless gods of the old world—changing the name, but keeping the nature. Fate may seem strong, but God and Love are stronger than Fate.*"

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1882.

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CHAPTER I.

IN THE COURSE OF A YEAR.

"An he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop—
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog."
TENNYSON.—"*Gareth and Lynette.*"

THINGS adjust themselves curiously sometimes, and in this world, as with the scenes of a kaleidescope, harmonious combinations are often formed out of what, at first sight, appear to be very incongruous elements.

When Christophe first appeared at the Monlin d'en Haut to assist at the evening meal of the pigs, it seemed little likely that at the end of a year he would still be there in the respectable character of right-hand man to Maître Bénéad Rannau; when Mdlle. Marie Laurent classed him contemptuously with his first mess-fellows as a "son of Rohan," and swept, dusted, and fumigated her little room as though his presence there had brought

contagion: it seemed still less on the cards that, when he returned to the house after his visit to the well, she should have already discovered that, after all, he was rather a handsome lad. And yet both these things had come to pass: nay, more, the whilom brother of the pigs presently found himself—quite unconscious of the fine degrees which led to the result—played off by the same dainty maiden as blind, lure, second string, and I know not what, in a somewhat entangled love affair which she was carrying on.

As for the first fact, it is to be accounted for by the collateral circumstances of the wind-miller's accident and want of an assistant at the very moment of the wanderer's arrival. New servants are not always to be found at a moment's notice when an old one has been dismissed, in, what the neighbourhood was pleased to consider, a rather peremptory fashion: and beggars are proverbially not allowed to be choosers. So when Christophe turned up at the nick of time to fill the vacancy, and showed himself, with a little neighbourly counsel, able to keep the mill going in a very fair fashion, the miller was glad enough to keep him on from day to day, pending his recovery, which, as had been feared, was not too rapid.

The boys also took to "Klasker," as they had named him, and pronounced him ten times better than Adam: and as for comely and kindly Madame Rannau, she felt

not a little proud of her penetration in having, as she said, actually discovered a jewel, if not *in*, at all events *among*, the snouts of her swine.

"Wasn't that just what Father Paul said in his sermon only the Sunday before?" remarked cunning Téphany to her invalid husband. "Didn't he *say* that if we would only believe it, most disagreeable things come as blessings in disguise (not that I mean the poor lad is *disagreeable;* not *really*, thou knowest, Bénéad, only he looked a little——little——at all events, Marie thought so). What I wanted to say is, that since he's proved a blessing, perhaps your accident will prove one too, Bénéad, my friend,—if thou wilt only open thine eyes to see it," she added, a little doubtfully, as her husband growled something which sounded like anything but an assent:—

"Ah, my best beloved, if thou wouldst only listen to Father Paul!"

But the miller was in a mood little suited either to finding blessings, or suffering sermons; and poor Madame Rannau, who, though a miller's wife, was as pious as any Bretonne connected with a less ill-famed calling* could be,* was fain to run out of the room to avoid hearing words such as Father Paul would certainly not have approved of.

After this brush with the miller, it was most refreshing to come out into the round-house and hear the miller's

* Why, I cannot tell, but millers are looked on in Brittany as men of loose morals.

man, grave and earnest-eyed, singing soft snatches from the hymn of Paradise, as he went about his work, closely attended by the two little bright-faced cherubs. And yet, with the miller's man as with the miller, the words he was uttering flowed rather from custom than from anything deeper. Religion, like everything else with him, had been stunned and deadened by that dark night's experience, and not yet could he bear to be face to face with a Crucifix.

Nevertheless, the lad's mind was recovering its tone. The restless terror of the hunted animal no longer possessed him; and if happiness were still a stranger to him, calm at least seemed settling down upon the soul so long tempest-tossed; the quiet, regular life, the kind care of a gentle mistress, the bright companionship of the innocent children; above all, *work*, honest continual, work, requiring attention which must not wander—all these healing influences were acting on the morbid senses, pouring in such oil and wine as no doctor but the Wisest can dispense.

By degrees, too, another interest awoke: the half-flattered, half-admiring feeling with which a very young man first perceives that he is an object of attention to a very pretty woman, rather older than himself.

That the dainty occupant of the little white room should deign to notice him in any way, was wonder enough to the homeless lad; but that it should be

favourably—that she should nod to him kindly as she passed through the round-house—that she should wish him good morning with a smile, and linger occasionally to exchange a word or two—this seemed to him little short of a miracle, and if it did nothing better, at least it raised him in his own eyes.

Pretty Marie certainly found him useful; and, what is more, the harder she worked him the more he seemed to like it. It was a pleasure to him to be made hewer of wood and drawer of water by this exacting little task-mistress, who never would do anything for herself if she could find a cavalier to do it for her. But woe be to the country cavaliers who submitted themselves too implicitly to her sway! She was wont to make them toil hard enough for her smiles; and more than one, dismissed when his services were no longer needed, had been heard to declare that her heart was as hard as her brother-in-law's mill-stones, and as crafty as that of the craftiest mouser which lurked behind his meal-sacks. Some whispered comparison, too, there was between the treacherous weapons sheathed within the velvet paws, and Mademoiselle Marie's unkind behaviour after softest allurements; but of such experience, barring the scratch received on his first introduction, Christophe had as yet had none. No; velvet was not softer than were those paws to him; and the most innocent-faced kitten among the feline inhabitants of the Monlin d'en Haut could not look

up at him with eyes less guileless than did the little sister of the miller's wife.

Moreover, as yet the lad neither demanded nor expected anything. He was pleased at her notice, and felt the smiles with which she paid him for his little services, like rays of sunshine in a cold and shady place. That was all, as yet. Of what is called "sweethearting," the lad had little idea; and he took what she gave him and did what he was told with perfect simplicity, suspecting nothing.

Sometimes, indeed, a little incident would occur which might have hinted to a mind more alive to jealousy than was Christophe's, that there was another claim on the mill-maid's smiles besides his own. Sometimes a name came up which brought a flush to the girl's cheek, a curse to the miller's lips, and aroused an instant's questioning even in the simple mind of the miller's man. But it was quickly forgotten again, and then things went on as before.

How long they might have thus continued, there is no saying, had not the end of the year after Christophe's arrival brought the afore-mentioned incidents up in a thicker crop, and led him into a nearer acquaintance with the owner of the aforesaid name.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINT.

"Cependant il se mit a penser que cette nuit lui coûtait bien cher. Il faudrait plonger l'écuelle dans bien des sacs de blé pour rattraper tant d'argent."

BRETON BALLAD—"*La Femme du Meunier.*"

It was winter again.

All over wide Brittany the crops had been gathered in; the busy flail had sounded its measure and ceased again throughout the land; and now every mill was merrily grinding the garnered grain.

The Monlin d'en Haut had its full share of work with the rest, though its master (as he said) was "not yet the man he had been," and still "not sound enough on his pins to stand out a good day's grinding;" nevertheless, the grinding was done, and so done that not a customer of Maître Rannau had any cause for complaint against the quality of the flour.

"First-rate quality—first-rate, friend Rannau," said one sturdy farmer after another, as he sifted a little of the meal through his fingers, and then, aided by the miller's man, packed the sacks into his waggon, and set his patient train of oxen in motion with the load.

"Ay, ay, thou'st got a tip-top grinder," another would

remark, with a glance, half-admiring, half curious, at the dark, silent lad who had come to the mill since they had been there with last year's corn.

"Where didst pick him up, friend Rannau?"

"A klaskervara? Ah, ah, ah!"

This last exclamation was grunted down in the throat, with a nod of the head and a twinkle of the eye, as if the answer accounted for something which had rather puzzled the inquirer. And that something *did* somewhat puzzle the farmers, might be seen by the way in which they looked at certain sacks, the mouths of which showed a larger lip of unused canvas than was quite necessary for tying-up purposes.

"Maître Rannau takes a trifle more toll than he used to do," whispered one to the other. "But what would you have?—the grinding's first-rate, to be sure."

At last, however, the whispers found voice.

"Yes, yes, the *quality* is excellent, miller," quoth one old farmer, who was never known to take wrong for want of plain speaking, as he lifted a sack of suspicious lightness;—"the quality's excellent, but the *quantity*, Maître Rannau, the *quantity*? Toll's toll, I know that, and the miller has his dues as well as the farmer; but there's such a thing as paying through the nose, and that I'll not do for the *best* grinding, by Saint-Corintin, will not I!"

Poor Maître Rannau. This was a heavy accusation,

and almost took away his power of speech. Justify himself he did in a fashion; promised to have his weights adjusted immediately, made compensation from his own toll-bin, begged a thousand pardons, and profoundly bowed the half-pacified farmer off the premises. But this did not conceal an ugly fact, nor clear up an awkward suspicion.

In a tumult of agitation he went to seek for his much-praised man, who had not been present at the lodging of this grave complaint.

"Holy Saint-Martin, what shall I do?" he ejaculated under his breath, as he dragged his stiff leg up the ladder which led to the grinding-room. "What shall I do if he, too, prove to be a good-for-nothing? Such a useful lad as he is, such a first-rate grinder, and I have him so cheap! Holy Saint-Martin, it's hard, I'm sure it is, when I've done nothing but reform this whole year, and haven't touched above a drop at a time ever since the doctor told me 'twould be my death if I did. Ay, ay! it's hard on a man that he should put away his sins and get nothing by it. It's not fair, it's not—the saints forgive me for saying it! If I'd been solid on my legs, now—— These ladders 'll be the death of me! Klasker, I say! What! Klasker, lad, where hast got to?"

The miller had by this time reached the grinding-room; but, except for the cats and their hidden prey, it was quite untenanted, and the rumble of the great mill-

stones drowned his voice and hindered it from penetrating to the upper storeys. Grumbling to himself, therefore, he mounted higher; but it was not till his head emerged above the level of the topmost floor that he saw the object of his search.

The mill-man was standing with his back to the ladder, looking out of one of the windows over the wide open country. His hands were clasped behind him over his powdery coat, and the wind from without was shaking down the meal from the ends of his thick, dark locks. As the miller stepped on to the creaking floor, the grinder started slightly and turned round; then, on seeing who it was, waited, as though expecting an order.

Maître Rannau, however, as well as his breath would allow him, burst out immediately with the episode which was troubling him, refraining purposely from any accusation, but narrowly observing his listener, expecting to find him self-betrayed.

Great was his astonishment, then, when Christophe, instead of showing either confusion or surprise, quietly took up his last words, and gave a piece of information on his part, which, for the moment, at least, completely changed his place in the master's mind from defendant to co-plaintiff.

"Roguery?" he repeated, calmly. "Yes, sir, that's just what I've been thinking myself. I've seemed to miss a handful here and there, more than once lately, over and

above what the mice can have taken; and this morning there was a footprint on the floor of the meal-room by Farmer Blanchard's meal-sacks, which wasn't yours, sir, or mine either: of that I can assure you.

"Where?" asked the miller, hastily. "Is it there still? Can you show it me?"

"As to that, master, I've little doubt but I can, for I took care not to disturb it when I lowered the sacks ready for the waggon."

So saying, the miller's man crossed the floor, and led the way down the ladders and into the room containing the great meal bins.

The wintry sunshine, which was racing with the shadows across the country outside, passed also through the little windows of the tall old mill, lighting in its passage upon the white meal-dust which strewed the floor, and making it gleam like a little carpet of finely drifted snow.

A passage was trodden right across the room from ladder to ladder, and there were marks of tracks where Farmer Blanchard's flour-bags had been lowered through the trap-door. The miller stood below the ladder, looking this way and that, with a bewildered expression, which did not clear, as his man, stepping gingerly to one side, approached a basket, such as country-women carry to market, which was turned bottom upwards on the floor. This he carefully raised, and then stood aside with an emphatic—"There, sir!"

Then the miller, too, came forward and looked. Sure enough, printed in the white dust was the mark of a man's foot, a short, broad, naked foot, with the marks of the toes clearly outlined.

"I put the basket to preserve it, sir; it must have been newly set when I observed it, for the dust hadn't had time to settle much, as you see."

Christophe said this, and then looked up, as though expecting a remark from his master. But the miller was still bending thoughtfully over the mysterious footprint, and it was full three minutes before he raised his head, and asked, still half abstractedly,—

"When was it?"

"When did I find it, sir?" corrected the miller's man.

"Yes, yes, of course. When did you first see it?"

Christophe considered.

"Well, sir, there was no wind last night, you know; it didn't rise till about five o'clock this morning. Yes, it was striking five by the mistress's clock when I heard it piping about the sails, and then I got up directly and went to put the gear into grinding order. It must have been half-past by that was done, and then I went to fill Farmer Blanchard's sacks—I judged he'd maybe come to-day. The bins were all locked—I'd had my suspicions and had done that the night before—and it was when I was going down to fetch the key that I saw yon foot-mark."

"You'd had your suspicions? Why didn't you tell me?"

Rannau asked this with a tinge of mistrust in his voice, and fixed a pair of searching eyes on the lad's face. But the clear grey orbs of the outcast boy met them unfalteringly.

"They were but suspicions, sir; I had nothing certain to say, and I was unwilling to trouble you about what might be naught but fancies."

"What grounds had you for supposing there might be a thief about the mill?"

The lad again considered a moment.

"Well, sir," he said, presently,—"in the first place, as I told you before, I thought there was meal missing now and again, I couldn't say how; but the flour which went back into the sacks didn't seem to stand for the grain which came out of them. Then I've heard queer noises at times, and once or twice I've fancied—— Your mill doesn't happen to be haunted, Maître Rannau?" concluded Christophe, sinking his voice and looking up questioning at the miller with his grave dark eyes.

"Haunted? Heavens, no!—not that I ever heard of. May the blessed Saint-Martin keep us from all harm!"

The miller looked a little scared, and crossed himself hastily, as he made this invocation. Then, after a moment's pause, he asked—

"Why?"

"I scarcely know," answered the lad as if half to

himself. "I scarcely know: but sometimes I've felt, when I was up at night minding the mill, as though I were not alone, and yet——"

The miller interrupted him hastily.

"Nonsense, lad, nonsense; spirits don't leave footprints, and the Dead (God rest them!) don't come for food except it be at Hallowmass. No, no; there's some one else to blame. Tell me, boy, are you always careful to lock the doors when you are not up here o' nights? Do you never leave the keys about?"

"Never! Except—unless——"

Christophe hesitated, and the miller immediately observed, and noted unfavourably, the sudden change from the firm "never!" to the doubtful words which followed.

"Well?"

But the lad did not answer. Thoughts and recollections seemed to be crowding upon and perplexing him, as he stood looking vacantly at the mysterious footprint.

"Well?"

The master repeated his question impatiently.

Christophe started as from a dream.

"Will Monsieur allow me to think a little before I answer him?" he said. "Some things have just struck me which may give us a clue. But I don't feel clear enough to say anything yet. Will Monsieur leave me till to-morrow? Things will, maybe, be clearer by then."

Maître Rannau hesitated, looked at Christophe suspiciously, thought a little longer, and finally turned hastily away with a cold "So be it."

"Look you, boy," he added, pausing with his foot on the ladder;—"see that no more corn goes meantime, or it'll be the worse for you; I shall hold you responsible."

Having said this, the miller descended the ladder and disappeared, leaving his man still standing with eyes fixed upon the footprint in the meal-dust.

"Mademoiselle Marie," whispered the lad to himself,—"Mademoiselle Marie."

He seemed scarcely to have observed the suspicion which was implied in the last words of his master, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts.

"Let me see," he went on, after an interlude of silent reflection,—"let me see. She took the keys out of my hand, last week, as I was hanging them up before going to bed; and it was that very night I thought I heard a footstep in the grinding-room. But, no, it *couldn't* have been; for all was safely locked when I got up to look, and there was not a soul to be seen. The saints protect us! What do I say? A soul?"

He shuddered slightly.

"Maybe," he went on in an awe-struck whisper, "I believe in them. I've cause, God help me! And yet he said the mill was not haunted. Can it be that *I'm* the

Jonah they are following after? God help me," he repeated, with a stronger shudder, and a nervous glance around,—"God help me, this seems to bring it back again; and I was feeling so free—almost forgetting, if that could be possible. And yet—it was just about this time of year!"

The old wild look was fast re-appearing on the lad's face, when suddenly the wintry sun, which had been behind a bank of snow-clouds, burst out and shone through the mill window full upon his figure.

The effect was magical. With a quick movement of the shoulders, he seemed to shake off the cloud of superstitious fear which was settling upon him, and went back to his work.

"No," he said, half aloud in a firm voice, "no; as master said, that's nonsense. *She's* at the bottom of it somehow, I do believe, though *how* passes me. But nobody else has had the keys. Well, well, I'll ask her."

CHAPTER III.

CAT AND MOUSE.

"A gowpen of meal out of every man's poke
And pretty girls, too, who can take a joke!
And my mill-wheels cry
Diga-diga-di;
And my mill-wheels say
Diga-diga-da!"
"*The Miller's Wife of Pontarven*."—(Ballads and Songs of Brittany).

TOWARDS evening the wind went down. The great sails stretched their idle arms, as if to say—"Well, well, work's over for to-day at least, and now we can rest ourselves and be at peace."

Christophe also stretched his arms wearily above his head and gave a great sigh, as he turned from the look-out in the topmost storey and prepared to descend the ladders.

"No, there'll be no more wind to-night, I'm thinking," he said to himself. "The sky's as clear as a pebble—north, south, east, and west; we'll have frost before morning, but no wind; so there's a night's rest for me."

He drew a long breath of relief, yawned and stretched his arms again.

They were long arms now and strong ones, too, and the

expanse of chest which lay between had widened and deepened considerably since he first appeared at the Monlin d'en Haut. You would hardly have recognised the haggard skeleton of that day, in the well-grown, healthy lad, whose powerful, almost massive limbs were displayed to full advantage as he threw off the burden of the long day's toil. The dark-locked head, also thrown slightly back with the gesture of relief, was carried a full inch higher than it had been a year ago; the hunted, haggard look had vanished from off it, the features had regained much of their youthful outline, and there was a wholesome glow upon the olive skin. Only the grave, deep, almost saddened look, which the Child of the Menhir had borne from infancy, was still there; it had deepened with his years, and now there was a nameless something mingled with it—a something which a stranger, and even one who knew him would have found it hard to analyze—the expression which lingers in the eye that has looked upon a horror from the realms of darkness, and cannot cast it out, even after years of light. The lad never quite lost that expression, even when his thoughts were furthest from what had caused it—nay, not even in his sleep.

He had locked the upper doors, and had descended into the grinding-room, when a shadow, flitting across the fast-gathering gloom beside the hopper, caught his attention and made him pause. He recollected the foot-print in the meal-dust, and was on the alert in an instant.

Making as though he would descend the next ladder, he just went far enough to leave his eyes on a level with the floor, and then stood at gaze.

Presently, with a stealth and noiseless movement worthy of one of the mill-cats, the shadow stole from behind the hopper, glided across the floor, and came to a stand beside one of the windows. Then by the flutter of the garments on which the waning light now fell, Christophe saw that it was a shadow of the feminine sex.

He was still watching, when, with a sudden movement, the figure left the window and made straight for the ladder.

Seeing that it was already occupied, she gave a little cry, and started back a pace.

"Mademoiselle Marie!" said the lad. "Why, Mademoiselle Marie, is that you?"

"Well, and what of that?"

There was a little defiant sound in the voice which answered, that took the lad rather aback.

"Nothing," he rejoined, half apologetically—"Nothing, only I wondered to find you here."

"Did you? Well, I can ask *you* now, since I suppose you've been upstairs. Have you seen Blanchette?"

"What? The big white cat? What do you want her for?"

"Imbecile that you are, what a question! I want her, and that's enough."

"Shall I go and look for her, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes."

She let him go half way up to the meal-room, and then called him back.

"No, never mind; it doesn't matter, after all. Klasker, come here."

The lad came obediently towards the window at which she had again posted herself.

"Tell me," she asked, abruptly, "tell me what ails Bénéad."

"Maître Rannau? Does anything ail him?"

"Come, what ails *you* this evening? You're as dense as a fog and quite as mysterious! Don't you know there's something wrong? Didn't Bénéad come straight up from Farmer Blanchard to talk to you? Didn't he come down again with a face as black as a thundercloud? And hasn't he been as cross as Old William all day? Don't you think *I* know? Come, you may as well tell me."

Christophe considered a moment.

"Well, I've got to ask her," he thought, "as well now——"

"Mademoiselle Marie," he said, fixing his great, solemn eyes full upon her face, which looked handsomer than ever in the soft evening light,—"there's been a thief in the mill, we think. Some of the meal's gone, and I found the print of a bare foot on the floor this morning. Mademoiselle Marie, I wanted to ask you—you've had the keys from me

once or twice lately—are you sure you've been careful to lock the doors and put them back?"

A sudden, deep, rose-colour flushed into the pretty little face, not to be accounted for by the pale reflection from the fading west. For a moment her eyes sank under his, then as suddenly she lifted them, and flashed on him a look which made the lad wince.

"Impertinent!" she exclaimed. "Dare you question me? What is it to *you* what I do with the keys?"

Christophe was struck dumb for an instant. This was not the voice he was used to from Mademoiselle Marie.

He recovered himself, however, with a speed which surprised and somewhat disconcerted the imperious little lady.

"Will Mademoiselle be pleased to think—this is a grave matter for me."

She seemed to consider a moment, then turned to him with her most winning smile:—

"Surely no one suspects *you*, my friend? There, don't look so sober, good Klasker. I'll make all straight for you with Bénéad. If he doesn't know what an honest, good, and trusty servant he has, I do, and he shall know it from me. There, dear friend, I can make any person see reason when I like, or any *thing*, for that matter. Why, even the very cats adore me! As for the men——"

She shook her fingers in the air with a merry laugh and a roguish look, and skipped away down the ladder, before her spell-bound listener had found a word to say.

"Well," he thought to himself, with an uncomfortable suspicion that he had had the worst of the encounter, I'll think twice before I lend her the keys again, anyhow. What am I saying? Surely the evil spirit of suspicion is in me! Christophe, my friend, thou must have a black heart to suspect that kind little soul; thou art ungrateful, thou art. Holy Sainte-Anne! how lovely she looked with the sunset on her face! I wonder whether Genofa has grown up as pretty? Ah, God keep thee, little sister, how long it is since we parted; thou must be well-nigh a woman grown!

CHAPTER IV.

"ONLY ADAM."

"I'd fool him to his bent!
Feed, should not he, to heart's content?"
R. BROWNING.—*Waring.*

THE miller's man went to bed early that night. He had been up betimes, had worked hard all day, and the excitement of his discovery, coupled with the subsequent discussion with his master, had, as the saying is, taken a good deal out of him.

Perhaps it was this excitement which prevented him from sleeping so soundly as usual.

Generally, when he lay down on his little pallet-bed in a slip of the round-house which had been partitioned off for his convenience, he never so much as *saw* the darkness which shrouded the deep brown rafters above his head; it was gone before he opened his eyes in summer, and when a piping wind whistled him up in the mirk nights or dim mornings of winter, he was not one to stay staring upwards when sleeping hours were over; as over they must be, or why was he awake?

So he would probably have reasoned, had you hinted at the possibility of sleepless nights; for these cruel blanks of

time—*nuits blanches*, as poets call them—are well-nigh unknown to the sons of stirring toil—toil which tires the limbs without unduly taxing the brain.

That night, however, Christophe learnt something of what it is to long for sleep and find it coy. Weary he was, indeed; but it was a weariness which was slow to find its remedy. He kept thinking of the events of the day, trying to solve the mystery which had invaded the mill; going back to the night of his first arrival, and starting with a strange sensation, as he suddenly recollected the figure in the topmost room, the sensation of intuition that the thread of mystery reached further back than he had fancied, for was not *this* also a link in the chain?

When at length he did lose consciousness, it was only to the actual moment. He did, indeed, forget that he was lying on his bed in the round-house; but the conversation he had had with Mademoiselle Marie went on again, and was continued in his dreams.

He dreamt that he stood with the keys in his hand; that she was pleading with him to lend them to her—"only this once more"—and she looked so sweet and so pleading, and the tears shone so piteously in her eyes when the pleading was like to be in vain, that he was just going to give in, when a man's voice——Was it *really* a voice?——

He started suddenly awake, and half raised himself.

Surely there had been a sound outside? The wind must be rising, in spite of the promise of calm weather;

he must get up and see to the sails. Yet he paused a moment, listening.

There was not a breath; not so much as the faintest sough of wind stirred the sleeping air around the old mill.

He must have been dreaming, indeed!

Christophe smiled at himself, shook away the rough locks which had fallen into his eyes, and was about to lie down again, when —— Hark! There was the sound again; closer this time, evidently just outside that part of the round-house where his bed was placed. Yes, clearly it was a voice, a man's voice; and, surely, there was a woman's, too? Christophe listened intently. The partition was only of wood, but the voices were pitched in a low, cautious key, and he could not catch the words.

The lad's heart beat with excitement. Here, at last, were the thieves; he might catch them on the very premises.

Stealthily slipping out of bed, he threw on his clothes, listened a moment to make sure that the intruders were still there, and then crept from the room.

His first act was to feel for the keys in that particular hiding-place known only to himself and his master, where they were now nightly placed. Behold, they were gone!

A thrill of dismay passed through the veins of the miller's man.

Could Maître Rannau have taken them?

Should he call him up and give the alarm?

He thought for a moment, then, fearing that his prize might escape him, resolved first to try the door.

It opened. Without waiting to think what this signified, he crept out into the open air.

Keen and frosty it was, the stars were shining brilliantly, and a sharp sickle of a young moon, rising behind the dark mass of the old mill, produced strong masses of light and shade.

Christophe crept along in the shadow, distinguished the outline of two figures standing close up to the palisade, gathered himself for a spring, and pounced, like a young leopard, on the taller, bringing him to the ground in an instant.

There was a smothered curse from the fallen man, a shrill cry from his companion; then the flutter of a petticoat brushed against Christophe, as she fled past him into the mill—was it into the *mill?*

A puzzled sense of exceeding discomfort rushed into Christophe's mind. What could it all mean?

Was it, indeed, Mademoiselle Marie?

Was this a tender meeting which he had interrupted?

Could it be that the supposed thief was a lover, secretly favoured by the maid of the mill? Christophe looked down at his captive with a mind divided between consternation and triumph; a dull, sick feeling of anxiety—disappointment—pain, (he knew not what it was), underlying it all.

The sudden fall had apparently stunned the man; at all events, he lay quite still. He had fallen out of the shadow (where he had been standing when Christophe first saw him) into the moonlight; and as the white beams fell upon his upturned face, a strange feeling came over the mind of the miller's man that all this was but the continuation of some long-past dream; for, surely he had seen that face before? Yes, and with the same light upon it that rested there at present. Where could it have been?

So bewildered was the lad, that for some moments he stood there stock-still, staring at the fallen man, searching in his own mind for a clue to the puzzle, and forgetting to take any measures to secure his prisoner.

Those few moments made all the difference in the relations between the two; Christophe had lost his opportunity; for, suddenly, without the slightest warning, the fallen man sprang to his feet, and turned to fly. This, however, he was not allowed to do. Fleet-footed as a deer, the mill lad, now thoroughly roused, made one bound forward, seized the fugitive before he had gone a dozen steps, swung him round with the impetus of his own speed, and grappled him by the arms. But the stranger, too, was strong, thick-set, and muscular; and though Christophe had the advantage in height and agility, the one was a full-grown man with every sinew hardened, the other was but a youth, still incapable of resisting a prolonged and heavy

strain. For some moments they wrestled together, then Christophe's young, pliant muscles bent under the tremendous grip of his opponent, and he was forced down on one knee. The check, however, was but momentary; calling to his aid a certain "*tour*" practised by the wrestlers of the Pays de Vannes, and probably not known to the Léonais, he applied it with such good effect, that his adversary, taken completely by surprise, was tripped up and thrown to the ground the very moment that he thought himself secure of victory. Again he uttered an exclamation, half curse, half cry; and this time Christophe did not allow himself to miss his opportunity. Without even rising to his feet, he sprang on the man's chest, and was about to secure him sufficiently to prevent his escaping, while he gave the alarm and took measures for confining him, when a little window in the round-house was hastily opened, and a voice of agony exclaimed :—

"Stop, stop! Oh, don't kill him!"

Christophe turned for a moment, but the fallen man made a sudden struggle to seize the opportunity, and the lad had only just time to prevent it by a well-directed blow in the chest, which took the man's breath with a sudden sob. In an instant the sob was echoed behind him, a pair of clasped, white hands were stretched out in mute entreaty, and, directly afterwards, a woman's figure rushed from the mill and sank on her knees with a gasp beside the combatants :—

"Oh, Adam, Adam!"

Christophe started with alarm; his heart seemed to stop, as he glanced at the pretty pale face—pretty still in spite of the tears which streamed down it. Yes, it *was* Mademoiselle Marie.

"Klasker," she entreated, presently, "dear Klasker, *don't* kill him, it is only Adam!"

"Only Adam?"

The lad repeated her last words—half as exclamation, half as question. She took it as the latter, and went on eagerly—

"Yes, yes, Adam Tonyk. You must have heard of him; he was servant here before you came, and knows the mill and us all full well; ay, and is well known to all of us. Klasker, I wonder at you," continued the girl, seeing the astonished dismay in Christophe's countenance, and, quick to take advantage of it, suddenly changing her tone,—"I wonder at you attacking a peaceable man in this way—I do. What did you take him for, then? Can't a man come on honest business without you flying at his throat?"

"On honest business, Mademoiselle?" repeated poor Christophe.

"Ay. What do you know to the contrary?"

"At *this* time of night, Mademoiselle?"

"At *this* time of night, Monsieur!" echoed the little witch, mockingly. "Why, what o'clock do you think it is?

Not yet eleven, I assure you. As for that, I've not yet been to bed!"

This last assertion, at least, Christophe did not doubt; but he was too much taken aback by the sudden way in which she had turned the tables on him, to take any advantage, beyond a hesitating reference to the mysterious footprint and the missing meal.

"Well, I'm ashamed of you, I am!" exclaimed the girl. "So you took him for a *thief!* Ha, ha, *that's* good, I'm sure. Adam, dost thou hear? he took thee for a *thief.* Speak up, my friend, and defend thyself."

Christophe marked the change of pronoun, the difference of address she used in turning from one to the other, and was conscious of a feeling he had never known before. Could it be jealousy? There was no time for an answer to this home-question.

"Make the fellow get up, Marie," growled the ex-miller's man in a stifled voice;—"how can I say anything with such a mill-stone on my chest. Saint-Kirio, must I lie here for ever while you two discuss the rights of the case?"

He was near choking with rage and suffocation.

"Yes, get up, Klasker, get up at once," commanded the maid of the mill. "How dare you treat an honest man in such a way? Get up, I say, and beg his pardon, this minute."

Christophe hesitated.

"But, Mademoiselle——"

She sprang up indignantly, and stamped her foot upon the ground.

"Do you hear me, sir? Get up this minute."

"But will he promise first to come with me to master and explain his errand? I must answer for——"

"Not at all; it is *I* who will answer. *Now* will you obey me?"

But still the lad hesitated, not knowing what to do. In his uncertainty, however, he had loosened his firm hold of the fallen man, who, quick as before to take advantage of any lapse of vigilance on the part of his captor, cut short the discussion by throwing him off, leaping to his feet, and escaping down the hill, before Christophe had time to stop him.

"Klasker," said Marie, laying her hand on the lad's arm as he was about to start in pursuit, "let him go—it's best so. You don't know what mischief you may do by meddling further."

Well, I'll go and tell master, anyhow," returned Christophe, half doggedly, as he looked after the fugitive, now already out of sight, and saw that, in the uncertain moonlight, pursuit would be useless.

"No, Klasker, don't, there's a good lad," was the girl's quick response,—"don't, I advise, I entreat," she went on, eagerly, as the lad showed no signs of relenting. "Klasker, my friend, we've been good to thee here; thou would'st not hurt us—me, in return?"

She was pleading now; all her imperiousness had vanished, the soft voice trembled and the pretty eyes looked up entreatingly, as she gave him the familiar pronoun, which, but five minutes before, she had denied him in favour of the intruder.

In any other circumstances, Christophe would have been won over at once. Not so now. In spite of the mist of glamour which she cast upon him, the miller's man suspected mischief, and saw tolerably clearly that to hold his tongue concerning this adventure might put him into what might prove a very awkward position. He was hurt, too, at the evident deceitfulness of the little witch; sore at the way in which she had fooled him, and not a little jealous to boot. So he turned from her without a word, and made for the mill-door. To get away, however, was not so easy. She hung upon him, she entreated, she stormed, and finally burst into a flood of tears, which, however, did not check her attempts at softening him by words.

"Would'st thou get me into trouble—wouldst thou destroy me? Klasker, dear Klasker, thou knowest *I* have always been thy friend. Listen here. Adam is the most innocent being in the world; but my brother Bénéad is a man of strange whims, as thou knowest. He took a prejudice against poor Adam—all for nothing, of course—listened to bad, idle tales, and dismissed the poor lad at a day's notice. See, Klasker, it is thou who hast got his

place; if it had not been that thou wast here to walk into his shoes, Bénéad would have ended by taking him back—I know that. Thou hast ousted him, Klasker; wouldst get him into more trouble as well? No, no; I am sure thou art too generous for that!"

Christophe looked at the flushed, eager face, and saw that, at all events on one point, the girl was sincere enough; and again a pang of jealous pain shot through his heart—or rather, perhaps, through his boyish self-esteem.

"Ah, I see," he exclaimed, bitterly, "you seem very fond of this Adam, Mademoiselle."

"Fond of him? Not that exactly, at least—at least not now," returned the girl, in some confusion. Then, as though she had taken a sudden resolution of confidence, she added hurriedly: "Klasker, I'll tell thee. There *was* a time when I was his *chère amie*—dost understand? But not now, not now, Klasker. *Now* I only pity him; I only see him to give him what little help I can, lest he should starve, poor fellow. Ah! Klasker, dost know what it is to be without a friend in the world? *He* is, except for me."

Christophe *did* know, only too well; and the remembrance softened him. The girl's confession, too, and her assurance that all tender passages were quite over, was a salve to his wounded self-esteem. She saw it, and was quick to follow up her advantage.

"Yes," she murmured, turning aside and speaking hurriedly, "it's only pity *now*. When one thinks—thinks

one has found someone else, who—I mean, false impressions give way before true ones. There, I'll say no more, but *he* has not got my heart. No, poor Adam, thou art well enough, but I know someone now who's worth twice as much to look at as thou art. *Now*, Klasker, wilt thou tell?"

She looked so bewitching, so coquettish, as she stood there with the moon's soft light upon her upturned face, that the lad's resolutions, senses—nay, his very convictions, were all charmed away. He yielded without another struggle, felt her seize his work-worn hand, and carry it to her lips in excess of gratitude; saw the slight figure flit from him and disappear within the dark door of the old mill, entered himself, and locked it behind him, and then went back to bed, with his young, foolish senses lulled asleep in a dream of bewitchment. Yet, ere he actually passed from his waking dreams into the scarcely less substantial visions of unconsciousness, a remembrance flashed across him which *ought* to have opened his eyes to the truth—This Adam—this night-prowler; yes, he was the very duplicate of the mysterious visitant to the top storey, the unaccountable miller he had seen on the first night of his coming to the Monlin d'en Haut.

CHAPTER V.

HONEYED WORDS.

"Trust her not, she's fooling thee."

—LONGFELLOW.

THOUGH, as the wise man says, stolen waters are sweet, it is generally but at the drinking thereof; certain it is that they seldom fail to leave an after-taste of bitterness.

Those honeyed words behind the gable—the nearest approach to the blandishments of love which had ever fallen upon the unaccustomed ears of the menhir's child—were intoxicating, indeed, for the time, and none the less so for the thin veil of concealment which hung about them.

"*He's not got my heart. Poor Adam, I know some one now who's worth twice as much to look at as thou art.*" To whom could these words refer? The tone in which they were spoken, the look which accompanied them, seemed to indicate the fortunate person plainly enough, and had sent a thrill of delightful half-certainty through Christophe's foolish heart, to which the eager desire for an exchange to certainty lent an added spice.

Could it be that this pretty little maid of the mill, the

beauty of Morlaix, the dainty little damsel whose scorn had so deeply humiliated him on his first arrival at the Monlin d'en Haut; and from whom, till this very minute, he had felt as far removed as a glow-worm from the moon—*could* it be that she cared for him—for *him*, a nameless wanderer? *Could* it be? The very possibility was too wonderfully sweet to allow him to sleep continuously. He kept awaking in a manner quite unusual to him, and asking himself the question, in a fever for morning to come that he might test the reality of what, perhaps, after all, was but a vision.

"The self-love of the foundling lad, which had never had anything whereon to feed—which had been starved and wounded and trampled on, till, had it been any other quality of less tenacious nature, it would inevitably have had the life stamped out of it long ago—was immeasurably soothed and flattered. She was so pretty, so coveted a prize, and—ah, it is so sweet to be loved, even when the agent is far less lovely than was Mademoiselle Marie!

And did he love *her?*

That, reader, is an important question which you must please to solve at leisure. Only remember that our hero is but a lad—poor, nameless, outcast, and unloved, and do not be too hard on his starved young manhood. "Stolen waters are sweet." Yes, *and* bitter. The sweetness had intoxicated him, the bitterness was to come. For they *were* stolen waters, insomuch as the price he had paid

for them was not his by right to give. He had been unfaithful to his trust; and Christophe felt this with a flush of enlightening shame, when, next morning, he had to face his master. Maître Rannau was quick to observe that the lad was avoiding him, and the slight suspicion, raised by his manner the evening before, was immediately strengthened. He let him alone, however, till evening, willing to give him the chance of an explanation; but it did not come. Mademoiselle Marie, too, held aloof from the miller's man, and he had not a chance of a private word during the whole day.

Poor Christophe! No wonder the sweetness melted rapidly and the bitterness took its place.

By evening he was miserable enough, and when, as he was setting things in order for a grinding night, the wind having risen to a fine breeze, he heard Maître Rannau's heavy step toiling up the ladders, he was fain to wish that charming Mademoiselle Marie had kept herself to herself.

"Now, then, lad," said the master, as he landed his heavy person on the floor of the topmost storey, "what hast got to tell me?"

The consciousness of concealment is not conducive to candour of look; and though Christophe by a great effort rallied his wits sufficiently to narrate a story which was true, so far as it went, yet the absence of the hidden links, which his promise to Mademoiselle Marie forbade

him to show, and the hesitating manner in which he skipped over the hiatus, made it sound anything but probable.

Maître Rannau felt far from satisfied; yet he had no grounds on which to build outward disbelief, and moreover he could not afford to lose a useful grinder, whose services, having taken him on in promiscuous fashion, without any fixed agreement beyond the formula—"for charity's sake"—he had almost for naught.

"Well, well, lad," he said, with suppressed irritation—"It doesn't sound too likely a tale, and I'm little wiser than I was before I heard it. Just you take care though that no more of my meal is spirited away. As I said before, I shall hold you responsible. You've a good berth here, my lad, I can tell you that—see you keep it."

Saying which, the miller turned on his heel and lumbered down the stairs again, leaving his man to a heavy night's work and the sombre company of his own thoughts.

Maître Rannau, though well advanced towards recovery, did little work now-a-days. Why should he, when he could get it so well and cheaply done for him?

Christophe had, indeed, a heavy night of it; but the morning brought a beam of joy.

After breakfast, as he was working away gloomily enough, a light hand touched him on the shoulder, and he turned round to see the miller's sister-in-law, looking more charming than ever, in a patch of sunshine, veiled with the

powdery dust of meal. Even the close-fitting Morlaix cap which she wore (not becoming to every face), did but set off the smooth dark rim of hair which showed beneath it, the bright, dark eyes and rosy face, like the jealous sheath of a horse-chestnut blossom, enclosing and half-concealing its dainty treasure. The remembrance of their last interview had called up a flush of richest colour, and the bright eyes glanced, half-coquettishly, half-shyly, from under their veiling lids.

"My friend," she said, softly, "wilt do me a favour?"

"Another, Mademoiselle?" He answered without the readiness she seemed to expect, for the bitterness of last night's rueing was still in his mouth.

"Another!" she exclaimed, taking her hand from his arm. "Why, what is the lad thinking of? What favour have I asked thee yet, my friend?" Then, seeing her answer in the lad's dark looks, she added, hastily—

"Ah, yes, I remember! And he regrets it! 'Twas such a little thing too,—the holding of one's tongue—that's all!"

"A little thing! Mademoiselle? 'Twas no little thing to me. I had no right to promise, and now master suspects me."

"Poor fellow! (she altered her tactics with a sudden perception of mistake). "Yes, yes, I know 'twas not easy; but there, 'twas for *me*, and I don't forget such services."

She said this with such a soft, sunny grace, that Christophe smiled, well pleased in spite of himself.

"But this favour's quite a different matter, dost see? I know a dozen lads who would think 'twas the *other* way round. 'Tis not *everyone* I'd ask to go with me to Morlaix Pardon, M. Klasker."

"To the Pardon, and with *you*—Ah, Mademoiselle!"

His dark face flushed all over with surprised gratification, and he made a timid motion to take her hand. She put it in his, and the lad stood looking at her with a strange beating at his heart. Her glamour was upon him again in full force. What more the little coquette expected the boy to do, I cannot tell; for she stood there with her hand lying passively in his, as though waiting. But he was too bashful to make any further advances as yet; and finding that this was to be all, Mademoiselle Marie suddenly drew away her hand, and with a quick "Well, so it's settled?" nodded her pretty head and disappeared as quietly as she had come, leaving the miller's man so dazzled and uplifted by her beauty and her favours that he had much ado to keep his hand steady and his head clear for the necessary work of the proverbially monotonous miller's round of daily toil.

Like a child, he took to counting the days till that fixed for the annual Pardon, or feast of the patron saint of the town; and this not like the pious, who looked forward to it for the pardons and indulgences attached thereto, but from

reasons more common to the young. The thought of escorting the beauty of Morlaix through the booths of the annual fair, of accompanying her to High Mass, and dancing with her afterwards in the *branle* which usually concluded such celebrations, uplifted him greatly, and quite cast out for the time the horrible sense of a pursuing fate, which, indeed, had troubled him much less of late with its ghastly possession. If the skeleton were still in the cupboard, at least the door was closely shut.

As for Mademoiselle Marie, she retained her ascendency over the lad, and whetted his desires for her smiles and her favour in a way that did infinite credit to her cat-like talent for mouse-playing—namely, by being exceedingly chary of either; and she managed this the better by going off at this juncture on a long-promised visit to an old aunt at Saint-Pol de Léon, and only returning late on the eve of the Morlaix Pardon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARDON.

"Avez-vous de belles fêtes
Pour honorer vos Patrons;
Et pour mettre en l'air les têtes
Avez-vous de vrais Pardons?"
—"*Le deux Bretagnes.*

"SHE has brought the spring and its sunshine with her!" thought Christophe, profanely (he might at least have given the Saint, whose day it was, the credit for that, as most pious Bretons would), as, after a long night's grinding, he looked from the windows of the Monlin d'en Haut, on the morning of the festival.

Lovely, indeed, was the early light—early both as regards hour and season—which rested on the swelling country; on the old grey town in its cup-like hollow; on the winding river and distant sea. Long lines of trailing mist, like yards and yards of thinest India muslin threaded with a weft of gold, outlined the course of the river, and hovered, blue-tinted, over Morlaix itself, showing by its colour that fires were already alight.

Already, too, the hum of awakening life—life that was to be so lively on this the town's high festival—was rising

into the early air. And how sweet was this young, fresh air!—balmy with spring's first breath, redolent of fresh-turned earth, new-springing herbs, waters set free at length (and for good, as every old gammer and gaffer, with bones just released from rheumatic pain, devoutly hoped) from the icy bonds of winter. Christophe even thought that he smelt primroses, and hastened down to see if, in a certain sheltering fold of the hill-side, well known to him, he could not find a yellow knot for Marie's broidered corsage. But, no, 'twas too early, and he was fain to conclude that the scent was but from association. Spring, sunshine, sweet air, and young beauty, were all there present to his senses; surely early blossoms should have been there too.

Of course, Maître Rannau could say naught against his man taking holiday on the Pardon. Miller though he was, and therefore not expected to profess a high standard of piety, to let his mill work on a holy day would have been to tempt ill-luck too openly; good as was his grist, no Christian in those parts would have dared to eat of it under such circumstances. So he locked the sails, hoped there would be no wind to tempt him, saw all his household depart in holiday gear, and sat him down to a solitary pipe and a well-filled jug of cider. His duty of course, as a Breton, was to have gone to High Mass and taken advantage of some of those indulgences of which, as a miller, he stood still more in need than his fellow

Christians of less dangerous callings; but then, as his neighbours said, when they saw good Madame Rannau and her little sons come into church without him:—"What can you expect of a miller? Lucky he has a pious wife to pray for his sinful soul!" And, indeed, Bénéad thought himself that he had done very well in sending his wife as proxy.

Madame Rannau, her sister, the two cherubs and Christophe, all went together straight to the cathedral, whose cracked bell was calling the people to prayer before pleasure; the people showing their devotion by obediently streaming all the same way, flooding the narrow streets from wall to wall with a river of human life in every variety of costume, which, however, was too tightly packed to be shown to advantage. What the body wore was just then of little moment, as nothing but the head was visible. Mademoiselle Marie was sadly exercised in her mind as to the fate of her new black skirt, black velvet bodice, snowy chemisette, and sky-blue shoulder-shawl; for, not being of exalted height, all these ran the risk of being considerably crushed by her fellow Christians; and her pretty lips showed a pout less pretty, because Christophe's strong arms had been monopolized (if such a word be allowed to express the doings of twins) by the two cherubs, who, pretty dears, had much ado to keep their curly heads above water.

It was a relief to all when the probation of street-

passage was over, and the waters of the river poured full tide into the sea; or, to speak without figure, when the people, (all of them, at least, whom it would hold), had been received by the Cathedral. The rest had no choice but to transfer their devotions to the shrine of Saint Mélain, further down the street. Our party from the Monlin d'en Haut, however, were among the fortunate ones whose vows could be offered to the patron saint of Morlaix in the sanctuary where he is most at home. This sanctuary, in truth, is not beautiful. The massive grey tower outside, rising like the honourable head of a fine old man above the lesser summits of Morlaix, has a venerable aspect of its own, but the space within, vast as it is, has no architectural beauty to attract the eye. Not a worshipper there, however, would have understood you, had you hinted at something wanting. To the simple and devout souls who flocked there, the great church of Morlaix was to-day the centre of all that was most sacred; the patron saint was holding his festival, and no one doubted but that his intercession would be that day all-powerful in Heaven. To the earnest Bretons gathered there, it was holiest ground; the blue paint of the roof was the floor of heaven; the paper flowers on the altar were as though fresh from the dews of Paradise, and the tinsel-robed images of saint and Madonna—especially the colossal figure of the patron himself, standing in the place of honour—signified the immediate presence of the holy

persons they represented, ready to bend attentive ear to the petition of the meanest.

There is something very beautiful in such simple faith, even though we of another communion may count it blind. Let us not be too hasty with our scorn; there are those who say "we see," yet use their spiritual vision to small purpose.

Christophe found himself, with Mademoiselle Marie clinging to his arm, carried away by the tide of entering worshippers, and drifted towards a little chapel to the right of the High Altar. Into this little haven, he half led, half lifted his panting companion, and looked round for Madame Rannau and her twins, who had been separated from him while entering the Church. Nowhere, however, could he perceive them amid the sea of white caps and dark, long-haired heads, which filled the great building from wall to wall. These were, for the most part, already bent in prayer, like the bending crests of waves on the swelling ocean, some white, some dark. An acolyte was censing the people, pressing his slow way through the densely-crowded aisles, his censor swinging cautiously in shortest oscillations lest it should come in contact with some down-bent face. Soft chanting from the choir, mingled and mounted upwards with the clouds of fragrant smoke, rosaries were fingered diligently by scores of horny hands; and who can tell the multitude of

manifold desires which rose from the secret chamber of those countless heating hearts? Would the saint grant to each his heart's desire? Strong, at least, was the faith in which each was craved of him!

But the Child of the Menhir knelt there dumb. Never since a date not likely to be effaced from memory had he prayed a real prayer. At first he had not dared; latterly, perhaps, he had not cared. Devotion, like every other art or science, whether of heart or mind, requires practice to keep it free from rust and cobwebs.

He looked at the praying multitudes, he looked at the pretty girl by his side; even *her* flighty thoughts seemed to have settled on the matter in hand, for her lips were moving, and the beads of her rosary were slipping quickly through her fingers. What was she asking the saint for? Christophe wondered, as he knelt by her; and then looked up and wondered whether, perhaps, there was nothing which he might ask; but he shuddered as he looked, for above the altar was the picture of a strong angel bending over the flames of Purgatory, the smoke showing black against his spotless wings, and his hand outstretched to rescue the souls in torment, while above the alms-box, hung beside, were the words: "*Pour les trépassés.*"

No wonder Christophe shuddered as he saw the anguished, pleading looks of the tormented ones, and felt that one pair of eyes were fixed upon his own face. Back upon him flashed the dying gaze of his father's victim,

hurried out of the world without a moment's warning—a look which had in it such ineffable reproach; and he felt as though, even if all the prayers of his life were devoted to that soul's deliverance, not one would be more than due. And yet he could not pray! Nothing could he do but kneel and shudder, and then, when Mass was over, linger a moment behind Mademoiselle Marie to drop a coin into the alms-box, that at least "*les pauvres trépassés*" might have the prayers of others more worthy than himself.

The mirth of the Pardon, the triumph of escorting the belle of Morlaix, were a good deal marred for Christophe by this little episode. It was as though the door of his secret closet had creaked on its hinges, and he had had another peep at the skeleton within. The sight was certainly not an exhilarating one, and Mademoiselle Marie wondered what made her attendant swain so silent and absent-minded, as they threaded their way through the crowded streets.

"Where is Téphany?" she asked, at length, piqued by his inattention; "I think I will join her. Klasker, you do not seem sociably inclined to-day."

The lad roused himself.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, I was thinking. But you'll stay with me, won't you? I really don't know where we shall find Madame Rannau among all these folk."

"Well, that depends," answered the girl, beginning to

relent. "If you'll remain awake, I don't mind staying with you, but if you're going to dream again; I recommend you to go home and do it in bed. Heavens, what a crowd! Did you ever see the old town look so alive?"

Morlaix did, indeed, present a lively scene, and a picturesque one too, though country people, at least in those days, were not likely to think much of the latter. The streets were so narrow, especially above, that only the narrowest ribbon of blue sky could be seen betwixt the high-pitched roofs of the old timbered houses, whose walls showed a very patchwork of black and white beams and plaster, crossing each other, in elaborate pattern-work, in and out among the hooded dormer-windows and narrow lattices. Storey after storey, in goodly array, fell politely, each behind the one next above it in the social scale of altitude, the lowest being open to the street, and showing a dim perspective within, only divided from the road-way by a low counter on which the tradesmen, who mostly inhabited these lowest storeys, displayed their wares. Piles of wooden sabots were ranged on one, stacks of gingerbread, "*galettes*" and sweetmeats, tempted the passers at another; while from a third, dangled the silver crosses and glittering chains, which are the ambition of every girl in Brittany.

Nor were these permanent displays the only traps to catch the coins of the hundreds who streamed into Morlaix from the surrounding country, for the treble purposes of

religion, relaxation, and business. Pedlers in goodly numbers, venders of miscellaneous goods for the day only had set up stall, booth, or other means of display at every street corner.

Stalls of confectionery, never seen but at a Pardon, were presided over by old women, whose tall-winged caps showed that they were no inhabitants of close coifed Morlaix. Piles of sticky coins, eagerly watched by sharp old eyes, grew higher and higher before the crones, as their sticky goods vanished from off the stalls down the throats of grave little Breton boys, looking like small men, in miniature editions of their father's loose breeches, long vests, and coats girt with bright blue woollen scarves. It was droll to see so much sweet-stuff devoured with such gravity under the shade of broad-brimmed felt hats, with velvet band and silver buckle, which would not have misbecome a clerical crown.

Child-women, so to say—for the little girls in white coifs, laced bodices, and full petticoats, looked as comical to unaccustomed eyes as did their brothers—bargained demurely with the hawkers of small wares, such as rosaries, pins, penny ribbons, and bright medals, stamped with the images of saints. Just outside the precincts of the churches, hung crowds of beggars—lame, halt, blind; in fact, every form of disease and species of deformity was there represented, leaning on crutches and sticks, led by children and dogs, or propped up in helpless misery against the wall.

These had come to beseech the saint for recovery; to vow a waxen arm, leg, or whatever were the limb affected, in case of an answer to prayer; or, failing this (perhaps it would be better to say, recovery or no recovery), to entreat the alms of healthier fellow-Christians.

Piteous, indeed, were the cries and petitions; still more piteous the stretching forth of palsied hands, the raising of sightless eyes, or the mute display of hideous sores. No more hideous spectacle of squalid misery could well be imagined, and it is matter of doubt whether such an *omnium gatherum* of repulsive disease and abject wretchedness could be matched outside the ancient province. Some of the least helpless among this wretched crowd supplemented the asking of alms by a curious attempt at trade. Those among the blind who could still boast of a glimmer of light, suspended strings horizontally along the sides of the streets, and hung from them farthing prints of some popular Breton saint or miracle, gaily coloured, with legend in print attached, which they repeated in sing-song voices; or else perambulated the streets, chanting religious canticle, amorous *sône*, or heroic *guerz*, the two latter sounding oddly from such lips. Others, chiefly those afflicted with some disease not affecting sight or movement, kept up a continual cry, to the better dressed among the worshippers issuing from the church doors: "Who has the round of the church to make barefoot? Who has the round of the church to make on his

knees?" And then some well-to-do farmer or tradesman who had made a vow, and felt his feet tender or his knees stiff, when he contemplated the stony road he must traverse in order to accomplish it, made a compromise with "my lord the saint," as he respectfully termed him, threw a little charity into the bargain, and paid in hard coin for its fulfilment by proxy.

Several of these wretched penance-mongers were performing their tour, groaning and panting, as Christophe and his companion passed the church of S. Mélain, on their way to the river-side meadow where the dancing was to take place; and Mademoiselle Marie paused a moment to inquire of the miller's man whether he had no occasion to engage one of them on his own behalf—"for," she added half-jestingly,—"if you haven't a vow, I am sure you ought to have a penance to perform, friend Klasker."

She looked up astonished when the arm which she held trembled, and the lad asked in a voice which quivered in spite of him,—

"Why, Mademoiselle? What, then, have you heard about me that you accuse me of—of—"

He paused.

She laughed lightly.

"Nothing, nothing. Why, Klasker, I shall think you've committed a murder directly, if you look at me like that! What ails you, lad?"

He, too, laughed; but his laugh had not the true ring about it.

"There, great-mouth," she went on, half contemptuously, "don't go about looking like a sinner on Shrove Tuesday when every one else is gay. I did but jest, and sure thou deservest a penance—ay, and a heavy one, too—for being so stupid and dull to-day. Why, I haven't heard a pleasant word, let alone a compliment, from that great mouth of thine since we came into town. I'm well-nigh ashamed of my gallant!"

Christophe laughed again rather foolishly, and was trying to get up a pretty speech, as they stood looking at the penance-mongers, when a sturdy Norman, who was standing by, called out in a jovial voice:—

"*Thou* art a nice young man for a pretty girl, thou! Why, man, thy tongue's lame at a compliment when it ought to be as glib as an oiled bolt with such a fair subject to practise on! Faith, I'll give thee a lesson, and I'll take her locks for my theme. Pretty mistress, they're well-nigh worth their weight in silver, so bright and silky are they (all I can see of them, that is, under this envious Morlaix cap!), and the tint is as fair as it's rare—there's rhyme and reason, too! Pretty mistress, wilt take a crown for thy locks? See (he showed her a basket of various-coloured tresses, black and brown, which hung on his arm). I've a huge fancy for these sweet souvenirs!"

The hair-merchant laughed pleasantly, as the well-to-do young girl, who had no need, like her poorer sisters, to submit to these periodic shearings to provide the wherewithal for holiday pleasures, tossed her head indignantly, and drew her companion away.

"Ah, ah!" he chuckled, as he watched the couple disappearing down the street—"I was a trifle maladroit to ask her before her beau. Mayhap, if I'd caught her alone, she might have been more complaisant. Faith, these Morlaix caps are mighty convenient for the trade; you may take the hair from under them, and few the wiser but the maidens themselves. Ah, ha, here comes a more likely customer; she looks as though she'd sell her very ears for that silver cross on the stall yonder!"

CHAPTER VII.

RIVAL PARTNERS.

"Avoid: it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady."
TENNYSON.—"*Gareth and Lynette.*"

MEANWHILE the younger portion of the crowd which thronged the Pardon, was rapidly flowing out of a meadow by the river-side, where—at, least, in those days—the dancing usually took place. On their arrival in this rural ball-room, Christophe and his pretty companion found it already well filled with dancers of both sexes—the girls seated on the grassy banks and mounds which hemmed it in on all sides, seeming to indicate some ancient fortifications; the lads and young men sauntering about in the middle of the fresh, sun-lit sward, waiting for the orchestra to strike up.

The musicians, composing this important element in the proceedings, were enthroned on a sort of wooden platform, erected at the end of the field under a large plum-tree, whose rosy buds were already swelling under the sweet influence of spring air and sunshine.

A chief of the dancers was about to be chosen from among the handsomest and most active of the lads present, and, no sooner did Mademoiselle Marie perceive

this, than she pushed her beau forward into the circle of competitors, insisting on him taking his chance with the rest.

Christophe was shy and bashful, even beyond what is usual among lads of his age; he was grave and sedate even for a Léonard—the gravest and most sedate of the Breton race; and so to be put forward in competition for a post, whose occupant is the cynosure of all eyes, irked him not a little. He reddened all over his dark skin, and tried to withdraw. But it was too late; he had already been perceived, and the other lads seized upon him with shouts of merriment, and almost compelled him to go through his paces with the rest.

Not to raise a commotion and bring upon him the further displeasure of the maid of the mill, Christophe thought it best to submit, hoping thus to get soonest through the ordeal, and obtain leave to fall back into the ranks. But he reckoned without his host.

Under the bright eyes of Mademoiselle Marie, the lad could not make up his mind to play the *ponlain de Pontrieux*,* as the Bretons call an awkward clown; and, though long disuse prevented him from doing what at one time was his best, the natural agility and easy lightness of movement which had distinguished him among the younger wrestlers and dancers of his native Carnac, had not departed from him, and forced upon their possessor a distinction which he by no means coveted.

* In the Breton language, *Hembeul Pontreau*—Colt of Pontrieux.

"Well done, the miller's man!" shouted the young men present. "Long live our chief of the dance!"

"How active he is, how graceful, how handsome," whispered the maidens. "And who is his chosen partner? The miller's Marie! Ah, she's a fortunate girl, she is!"

And now the hautboys, the tambourines, and the binious (or bagpipes) of the orchestra struck up a somewhat solemn and measured strain; the young men sought out each his maiden in her place on the green embankment, and led her on to the daisied sward. Mademoiselle Marie, beaming with exultation and gratified vanity, took possession of her swain, and conducted him—will he, nill he—(as it seemed to Christophe, who passively followed her lead) to a place at the head of the couples, and the dance began.

A stately affair was this same dance, or *jabadäo*, as it was called; evidently the remains of the sacred measures in which the Celts of the olden times were wont to take part with the white-robed, oak-crowned Druids at their head. No Druids were they now who gave the usual signal and led off the long string of couples, but a pretty young maid, in white coiffe and chemisette, and a tall, dark stripling in long coat and vest, girt with a bright blue woollen sash. Nothing but their graceful movements and good looks, specially distinguished them among a band where all were more or less active and picturesque, and yet every movement of theirs was carefully observed and scrupulously imitated with the most religious exactness.

Now they formed a line, advancing with measured step; now they wound in and out, changing hands, weaving, as it were, a mystic chain; then the leader sprang lightly into the air, made an evolution, and fell back on to the sward with a heavy tramp of wooden shoes, each couple following in turn while the others filed right and left, and then took hands for the chief and his lady to pass under.

Sufficiently exhausting, too, it seemed to be, for when all the steps, or *passe-pieds*, had been punctually executed, the colour in the damsels' faces was considerably heightened, and the swains were glad to sit down on the banks, each by his partner's side, and mop up streaming brows with gigantic cotton handkerchiefs.

During the last few movements of the *jabadäo*, Christophe had observed that the dancer next to him in the line had regarded him, whenever they met, with a gaze anything but pleasant. He was a man with a short, strong, thick-set figure, black hair, and sallow complexion; and the keen black eyes which looked from under the strongly-marked brows, followed the leader's movements with a mixture of scorn, contempt, hatred, and jealousy, which puzzled their object not a little, for he was too much occupied with his own part in the dance to spare much attention for his fellows.

Presently, however, a movement in the measure brought them face to face, and then Christophe recognised with a start the nocturnal visitor at the mill, whom Mademoiselle Marie had called Adam.

She did not seem to see him, as she tripped along on her partner's arm; but no sooner was the ceremonial *iabadäo* over and the gayer and less complicated dances about to begin, than this morose-looking personage strolled up to the pair, as they were sitting on the mound, and without deigning to notice the youth, asked the maiden to be his partner.

Mademoiselle Marie started violently on hearing his voice, and looked up with a rush of crimson all over her rosy face.

"Adam!" she exclaimed, "*thou* here!"

"Yes," he answered, "as you see, Mademoiselle."

There was a sort of ceremonious stiffness in his manner, not usual among peasants; but the sidelong scowl at Christophe showed that he was putting strong force upon himself not to spring on him, as a dog does on his rival. He waited a little, then, as the music struck up and the girl looked irresolute and hesitated what to answer, he spoke again, this time almost roughly.

"Come," he said, "we waste time, Marie."

"But—" she began, with a glance at Christophe.

The latter took up the word in her stead.

"No," he said, rising as he spoke, "this dance is mine; the lady promised it to me. Did you not, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, but——"

"But she gave *me* the first right! I was her partner before ever she set eyes on you—interloper, hypocrite,

no-name! Curse you! I'll make you repent this, I will!" exclaimed the man, in a fury, which increased, as Christophe, drawing his partner's hand through his arm, moved off without reply.

"Adam," cried the girl, in evident distress, turning her face towards the discarded mill-man, as she was hurried away by his successor.—"Adam, don't be so vexed; only this dance, and then——"

But music and distance made the rest of her speech inaudible; and the next moment she was treading the daisies with light feet and kittenish grace of movement, the prettiest girl in the dance.

Adam joined the circle of on-lookers and scowled as before, only, if possible, with added gall; and so soon as ever the music was silent he again joined the pair, and continued the conversation, if such it could be called, where it had been broken off.

"You shall repent this, you shall," he said to Christophe; "those who've travelled the country with *klaskervaras* and *pillaweers* (he laid a meaning stress on these two words) are not fit partners for an honest maiden, though there's no reason why they should not be good enough to play a part with the *pen-bas*.* Wait till I catch thee alone, my fine fellow, and we'll see what thy training has done for thee!"

The insulting tone of this speech, especially the contemptuous sneer with which the latter part was spoken,

* The Breton quarter-staff

stung Christophe doubly, because spoken in presence of the pretty girl who was the bone of contention.

"I'm not afraid to encounter you or any one," he said, hotly. "Choose your own time. *I* shall be ready."

"Very well, then," returned the other,—"we'll show Mademoiselle here, who's the fittest man to be her partner, thou or I. *Man*, say I! Saint-Corentin, pardon me, he's only a boy! It would be a shame to hurt him. Come, Marie."

And having let fly his parting arrow, one sure to hit and rankle with a lad of Christophe's debatable age, he moved off with the maid of the mill.

Christophe sat out this dance, waiting for the next, which Mademoiselle Marie had already promised him, in anything but an agreeable state of mind. At first it was the contemptuous tone of the elder man and his slighting words that vexed him most—Youth is such a terrible reproach to a lad of eighteen or nineteen. Probably not even David himself, wise beyond his years as he undoubtedly was, escaped a prick of mortification when Saul objected to his championship on the score that he was "but a youth." Yet as the years roll on, *age* becomes an equally sensitive point; such are the strange vagaries of human nature. Presently however, as the lad sat there watching the dancers, the wounded sensitiveness of young manhood gave way before the sudden sense of fear.

"Klaskervara and Pillawer!"

Could this man Adam have meant anything special by these words? Did he attach any deeper meaning to them than what lay on the surface? Was it possible that he knew anything of the dark history of the present grinder at the Monlin d'en Haut?

The mere idea of the thing made the cold dew break out thick on the lad's forehead, which just before had been flushed and heated with his exertions in the dance. The gay whirl of the moving couples seemed to reel before his eyes, and he leant his head on his hand with a sense of giddy sickness. The ceasing of the music did not rouse him, and it was some moments before he perceived that the dance was over and the couples forming again for a new one. He looked up, to see Mademoiselle Marie, still leaning on the arm of the former grinder, taking her place with the rest! As he raised his eyes, she turned and glanced towards him; shook her head, and laughed roguishly, as he half rose to claim her, made some merry remark to her companion, and began to dance.

Christophe could see the malignant grin on Adam's face as he carried off the prize, and his blood boiled at the slight. Without waiting to see more, he hurried from the dancing-field and walked quickly away, not caring whither.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEEN IN THE FIRELIGHT.

"Legions seemed gathering from the misty levels
. . . . to supply these ceaseless revels—
Foul ceaseless shadows."

SHELLEY—"*Revolt of Islam.*"

THE sun had long set, and a crescent moon was rising behind the Morlaix hills, before Christophe turned his steps back towards the town. He had spent the remainder of the festival wandering restlessly about the surrounding country, now chafing under the insults he had received, now giving way to an access of cold fear as he thought of Adam's words. Luckily for him, he had wandered a good deal in a circle with frequent pauses to rest and muse gloomily on the trunk of some fallen tree or mossy stone, otherwise small would have been his chance of regaining the mill before the master's appointed hour for resuming work.

As it was the church clock was striking nine as he neared a village, which, having often gone there to carry meal, he knew to be fully half a mile from the town. All was very still as he passed down the village street. The inhabitants had already retired for the night, according to all appearance, for not a light burnt in the cottage windows, and the young

moon alone shone on the narrow panes, and touched the tops of the tall poplars in the little churchyard. As Christophe neared this, however, he caught sight of a ruddier gleam than that of the cold white crescent, flushing the sky for an instant, sinking again, and then rising anew to smirch the pure air of the spring night with a dash of black and scarlet.

He quickened his steps to reach the rustic stile which led from the further end of the long village street across the churchyard, and then, by a short cut, through the fields to Morlaix. As he drew nearer, a medley of strangely mingled sounds met his ear, now rising in wild confusion, like the red gleam which had first attracted his attention, now dying away into almost utter silence.

Mounting the wooden stile, he suddenly stopped in the act of descending, as the cause of the, till now, mysterious light and sound broke upon him.

For a moment a superstitious tremor had come over him; he could scarcely have been a Breton had not his first instincts at this unexplained stir in a churchyard at night pointed towards the supernatural. But a moment's glance was enough to satisfy him that the assembly, strange as it was, belonged to this side of the tomb.

A wilder and more fantastic scene it would be hard to imagine than that on which the eyes of the miller's man now rested. Filling the eastern end of the little churchyard, which sloped down towards the fence separating it

from the heath outside, and was well sheltered from what wind was astir this mild spring night by a row of poplars planted north and west, was an assembly more motley and strange-looking than is often to be met with outside of Brittany. All the beggars, the penance-mongers, the itinerant minstrels of the poorer sort, the mountebanks—in fact, the whole of the penniless crowd—halt, maimed, blind—which had flocked to the Pardon during the day which was just over, seemed to have sought here their night-lodgings. The whole ragged assembly was encamped here, "under the fair star," "in the keeping of God," as the French poetically put it; only that in this case the poetic element had a dash of the ghastly, from the fact that these miserable beings, who all seemed more or less to be fighting for their wretched lives against the ever-tightening grasp of death, had chosen for their couches the graves of those who had already succumbed to the King of Terrors. A fire of sticks and heather had been lighted on a gravelled space immediately within the little gate which led out on to the heath beyond; and a second and larger one burnt redly and fitfully just outside on the heath itself. Around both these, as well as under the lee-side of all the nearer graves, and against the eastern wall of the church itself, the beggars lay encamped, their bread-wallets at their feet, their long white staffs (part of the professional insignia) at their head.

Every form of wretchedness and vice, as well as every

attitude of rest, found its counterpart among the crowd. Here reclined a legless trunk, its head against a grave for a pillow, its crutches flanking it on either side; there a blind beggar, with eyes terrible in their loathsome disease, and long white hair waving in the night-air, crouched over the fire, with his sightless gaze bent unflinchingly on the red glow of the embers; the watchful, wistful gaze of his hungry dog being fixed as untiringly on the wallet, at which the dog of a fellow-sufferer was snuffing as near as he dared.

Against the church wall leaned a crowd of wretched women, young and old, huddled together for warmth, and keeping up, apart from the men, an occasional buzz of conversation. On the side of the smaller fire furthest from Christophe a group of more vigorous mendicants were counting over their gains, bursting out now and again into hot dispute or envious invective. A couple of long-haired Breton boys—the children of some deceased, disease-slain wretches, perhaps, but in whom the hereditary taint was still apparently so far in abeyance as to leave them spirits for some of boyhood's sport—were rolling down the slope just outside the sacred enclosure, laughing as loud as they dared, till cuffed into silence by some sleepy elder. A wretched baby wailed in the arms of a mother still more wretched, who sat under the shadow of the tall churchyard cross.

A couple of idiots, old and grey-headed, without the wisdom of the hoary head, laughed, now at each other,

now to themselves, as they plucked the daisies from the short grave of a little child, and tossed them in sport, too pitiable for ridicule, in each other's faces. Around the larger fire a crowd, still more numerous and motley, had assembled, and the sound of old men's prayers, pattered in Latin which they did not understand, mingled strangely and incongruously with the voice of a blind singer chanting a country ballad, and the insane cries of some unfortunates who had sought to forget misery by drowning it in the sour wine of the country. And the countenances, all bearing the stamp either of vice or misery, or both—the costumes torn and ragged, yet still showing by cut or tarnished embroidery the village to which the wearer belonged—who shall paint them with mere pen and ink? Imagination must step in here. Add the background behind all these figures—the dark heath, stretching in billowy swellings to the hilly horizon; the rows of plume-like poplars; the little dome-belfried church, with its dark grey roof and whitened walls; the wooden crosses at the head of the graves; and then throw over all the mystery of mingling, changing light and shadow; the cold gleam of the young moon, wading through fleecy flocks of clouds; the red glow of the fires, whose flames rose and fell, according as the breeze, salt with the brine of the not distant sea, rose to fan them, throwing the fantastic figures and grotesque faces into strong relief—or passed away with a moan over the dead heather, letting the light sink down, and turning

the whole assembly as if into a company of ghostly shadows, moving fitfully in the dimness. Let your imagination thus colour and fill in the etching which I have given, and you will have a picture not less remarkable than strange.

Christophe himself, hidden behind the branch of a tree which shaded the stile, looked long at the motley spectacle. There was something about it which fascinated him strangely, so that he could not turn away his eyes.

"Klaskervara and pillawer"—so he had been himself called that day; here, then, were his brethren and companions!

The lad shuddered with repulsion as he looked at the wretched groups before him; and, as he looked, his eyes, as if by a strange involuntary magnetism, sought the group of more hearty vagabonds on the far-side of the little fire, and, as he turned that way, the face of one among the number turned towards him.

What was it that made his heart stop suddenly as though a cold hand had grasped it? What made a feeling—chill, horrified, and sick as that with which one might view the messenger of death, pass over his whole being, bathing brow and temples in dew?

He scarcely knew himself, so sudden was the apparition, so instantaneously was it blotted out again by a sudden gust of wind which seized the flames of the fire and whirled them down to the ground. A moment and he

could distinguish nothing ; then, as suddenly, the red blaze once more sprang up, illuminating and calling into strong relief the whole of the beggar company ; yet Christophe had eyes but for one group, and one figure amid that group. The face was again turned from him, and he watched for its returning with a fascination he could not resist.

Yes, there it was again, the red glow full on the mean features—the greasy, sallow skin, the long matted locks, streaked with the first flakes of a snow that would never be venerable. The keen, cunning eyes were looking full his way. Did they see him?

Though, from his position and the falling of the light, this was most unlikely, Christophe shrank back almost without intending it into the deeper shadow, but continued to watch the face, as though his eyes were nailed there.

In spite of changes, in spite of a general look of less flourishing circumstances, which had sharpened the mean features and decreased the oily, well-fed look about the cheeks and jaw, Christophe recognised that face but too well. It was one he could never forget ; one he had seen with his mind's eye far too often, when the dark hour was upon him, to leave the slightest room for mistake as to its identity. For it was the face of his evil genius, Matelinn Gourven.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE CATHEDRAL.

"I have heard many speak, but this one man—
So anxious not to go to heaven alone—
This one man I remember, and his look!
JEAN INGELOW—"*Brothers and a Sermon.*"

WAS the recognition only on *one* side? Christophe asked himself that question with a sick terror.

He could not tell. The eyes continued to look his way, and yet there was no appearance of recognition in them. Still he did not feel secure.

He longed to fly, yet dared not move while the face was turned his way.

The soft, damp night wind was soughing among the poplars, balancing their graceful tops to and fro, and setting all their nervous leaves a-tremor, like the patter of soft rain; yet the lad was afraid of the sound of his own sobbing breath—afraid that the least movement on his part would draw on him the attention he so dreaded.

With every nerve throbbing, he continued to gaze, till all of a sudden the face moved. The figure, half hidden behind the fire, rose to its feet.

That was enough for the lad. The terror which had held him motionless took another phase at the idea of

pursuit: he leapt from the stile and fled, as though the demons from the nether darkness were behind him.

The damp soft air rushed past his ears, as he ran; the tinkle of a blind man's dog-bell, the gibbering laugh of the idiots, the quarrelsome oaths of the drunken beggars sounded in his rear, and were turned for him into one dread sound which seized on his imagination and lent wings to his feet. The Monlin d'en Haut, his work, Mademoiselle Marie, his rival's threats, all were alike forgotten in the one thought of escape. The safe asylum, the quiet security of the wind-mill, was snatched from him in one day, and again he was a fugitive and a wanderer on the face of the earth. But the insane terror which had prompted his first flight did not last long. The lad was healthy, well-fed, and in good condition, and such fear as knows neither bounds nor reason does not generally utterly master the mind while the body is as it should be. Once out of the village, he slackened his pace, glanced over his shoulder, saw no one, and then stopped to listen.

No, there was no pursuit; no sound of footsteps on the road, no panting breath of one who follows hot behind; nothing but the night wind, sweeping softly inland from the sea, over the broken ground covered with heath and scrubby brushwood, and dotted by rocky fragments, which lies between Morlaix and the Channel. Nothing but the bleat of a flock of lean black sheep, picking the scanty

herbage by the tidal river, and the wash of the brackish water among the reeds.

Partly re-assured by the silence and solitude around him, the lad walked on at a more sober pace, following the high road which led over the heath away from Morlaix. Return there, he could not, even to take leave of the family at the Monlin d'en Haut. The ex-grinder's meaning words, the neighbourhood of the man he loathed and dreaded more than death, had roused his slumbering fears. He dreaded discovery; he dreaded recognition by his father even more.

No fixed plan had he at present; he did not even think of how he should avoid the privations of his last tramp; his only thought was to get away, to put as many miles as possible between him and Morlaix before he thought even of rest.

The grey March morning was breaking in the east, as he entered a little grey, grim, silent town. Very grey was it, for the streets were paved and the houses built of cold-hued granite. Very grim was it, for the houses were massive and severe in architecture, and all attempt at ornament consisted chiefly in solid coping over little and lower windows, in tall, narrow dormers above the grey-slated roof, finished by grim stone dragon, or grinning face. Very silent was it, too, for the shutters were closed—the inhabitants seemed all asleep, and only the cold, salt wind from the neighbouring sea rushed through the solitary streets.

It seemed at first as if Christophe were the only living being astir there; but presently, as he turned the angle of a house, he came almost full tilt against a cassocked priest and a tall lank kloärek going to early Mass; and, looking up, beheld before him the towering front and twin spires of a grand old granite cathedral. Then, for the first time, it struck him that this must surely be the priestly city of Saint-Pol de Léon. Other figures, few and far between, it is true, for it was still very early, were coming up, looking still half asleep, from the streets converging into the open space around the cathedral, and soon after the bells began to ring. Then Christophe, following the example of the rest, pushed open the heavy padded door, over which a gigantic stone figure of St. Paul of Léon kept watch and ward, his drawn sword in his hand, and entered the building.

It was very vast and scarcely more than half lighted by tapers at the many side altars, and the great wax candles on the high altar, seen far away in dim perspective from the western door. Yet, in spite of the shrouding gloom, the lad felt at once that here was a church whose fair proportions and venerable grandeur far exceeded that of any he had ever before entered.

There was something in the forest-like rows of fluted pillars separating the shadowy aisles, and increasing in number as they proceeded east, in regular gradation; first single rows, then double, then treble, flanking the glorious choir with its rich carving and exquisite tracery in

imperishable stone—a something which took hold imperiously on the Breton reverence and veneration for the unseen world, latent in every true son of the ancient province, and which not even the rude shocks they had sustained had been able to destroy in the wanderer's soul.

A mighty force, an overwhelming sensation as of a tremendous Presence overshadowing and dwarfing his own little individuality, came upon Christophe. He looked up, almost in superstitious expectation of beholding some palpable sign of Divine presence, but there was nothing in the dim height of the vaulted roof, nothing but the calm faces of stone angels guarding the spring of those soaring arches behind their outspread wings; nothing but the prayerful countenances of saint and sovereign, and beyond them, towering above the rood-screen, a great wooden Crucifix. Christophe's eyes fastened on this at once. Familiar as was the object, there was something in that stupendous Figure hanging up there athwart the darkness—the representation of the greatest agony, the greatest humiliation this world has known—that took hold of him, as he stood there, with the awe upon him which churches such as this so often inspire, making him fall upon his knees and cover his face with his hands. For him, ever since that night when he had fled with the stain of blood upon him, there had been something terrible in the sight of a Crucifix, making him look the other way whenever he passed one. The feeling was there still, but the heart

which had hardened itself against religion's softening influence now felt strangely subdued. There were reasons, doubtless, for this besides those which could be traced to the impression made by this place so sacred to the Léonard, the shrine of their great Saint-Pol. There was the sense of utter helplessness in the toils of inexorable fate; the suffering for a sin not his own, which he could not escape; there was also the bodily prostration, brought on by strong emotion, violent exertion, and fasting since early the day before. No wonder all this reacted on mind and soul, and kept the lad, half kneeling, half leaning against the pillar by which he had placed himself. The priests at the high altar began to celebrate the Mass, little acolytes in white and scarlet swung the perfumed censors to and fro, voices rose and sank in measured cadence, the people bowed to the earth before the sacred Host; none observed the boy who knelt alone in the shade. The whole impressive ceremony passed before him like the visions of a dream. The service was ended, the priests and servers left the church, the sacristan extinguished the tall candles, and the congregation withdrew. Still Christophe did not move. From his kneeling position he had fallen just a little forward, so as to rest his head against one of the straw-bottomed kneeling-chairs. That was all the outward difference, yet if you had looked at the lad's face you would have seen that he slept profoundly.

When he came to himself again, it was at the ring of a

well-known voice. He started violently, and lifted his head from the chair where it had been pillowed. The great church was full of light, the sun shone through the painted windows, casting a rainbow radiance on to hundreds of upturned faces, listening intently.

Not a sound broke the silence of the great church beyond the passionate tones of that one voice, which seemed to pierce through the space which separated preacher and congregation right to the heart of every unit in it. Men and women, young and old, all seemed to feel the spell, and to sit as though bound hand and foot beneath it. Such a well-known voice! No wonder it had called the lad from his long trance-like sleep, bringing up, like a sudden vision, the wind-swept heath of Carnac, the little village, with the home-like features he knew so well, the very sough of the breeze and scent of the whin-bloom among the old Druid stones whom they called his sires.

What was the magic which had wrought all this? Christophe looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Was he still dreaming, or did he know the man who stood in the pulpit? Surely the face was strangely familiar—familiarly strange!

He looked again, he could not but look.

Who was that young priest with the dark intense face, the deep piercing eyes, the pallor of watch and fasting on the wan brow and hollow cheek?

Whose was that tall and massive, yet attenuated figure,

gaunt with the denials of an ascetic life, those large, thin, transparent hands, outstretched in passionate pleading, in terrible warning, in dread denunciation over the people?

Whose?

"Bernèz!" exclaimed the lad, in a hoarse whisper. "Bernèz!"

The exclamation had taken voice in spite of himself. He glanced up at the preacher once more, and then round at the people, dreading to have been overheard. But, no; preacher and people were alike too much occupied with the sermon to have attention to spare for anything else.

It was a wonderful sermon; a torrent of passionate eloquence, rushing, heart-hot, from the very depths of the young preacher's being, and washing away, by its very fervour and impetus, all the barriers of pride or worldly indifference from around the souls of his hearers. You could see, on the upturned faces, the reflex of what was going on within; you could see how the preacher, like a skilled musician, was playing on the heart-strings of his audience; now plucking with merciless fingers at the sin-hardened chords of strong men, making them wince and quiver under the torture; now laying his hands more gently, if quite as fearlessly, on the more finely-strung feelings of the women. Watching those faces, it was as though in their expression you could read the heart-music thus awakened. Terribly groaned the bass in the soul of that old man with the thin lips and the shower of silver

hair falling over the velvet collar of his long black coat, as the young prophet spoke of the terrors of death and judgment for one whose treasure had been hoarded here and not laid up for eternity. The thin lips quivered, the eager eyes took a terrified expression, the old knotted fingers clasped and unclasped upon the top of his staff.

Sharply cried the treble in the hearts of women, who wept and shuddered, with white caps all a-flutter, under the picture of the Last Day, when the doors shall be shut, and the foolish virgins, whose days were spent in pleasure here, should knock in vain against the closed door of the inexorable Bridegroom. Young men—there were many kloäreks among them, for this was an ecclesiastical city—turned pale, flushed with enthusiasm, fidgetted uneasily, or kindled with religious exultation, according to their various states of mind, as the young, fervid voice rang out like a trumpet call, summoning all to leave all for what is well worth all earthly goods. "Follow me! Evangelise the world! Cast out the great dragon of sin! Conquer yourselves! Reign with your Captain for evermore!"

The preacher's voice rose into a thrilling ecstasy as he pronounced these last words; then it ceased suddenly, as he paused for a moment with eyes raised to heaven, and hands clasped, as though in prayer for his hearers. As if by one impulse the whole of that immense congregation fell at once upon its knees, and for some moments silence reigned through the great cathedral, broken only by

an occasional sob from the women, a deep, catching breath from the heaving breast of some strong man, and the light rattle of the rosaries, as the people, with trembling fingers, told their beads.

It was Ash Wednesday. Christophe had not remembered it till this moment, when, carried away like the rest by that stirring appeal, he, too, fell on his knees once more upon the hard pavement. The kneeling-chair seemed too soft for the knees of such as he. Who was there here who had need of so much penitence?

When he looked up again, the preacher was wiping his pale brow. The pallor of his face had increased to a degree which was almost ghastly! A faintness seemed to have come over him, for he was tightly grasping the edge of the pulpit, as though for support.

Some one—the sacristan, as it appeared—brought him a glass of water; but he waved it aside, mastered the faintness as though by the mere effort of a powerful will, and went on again:—

"What must I do to be saved?"

He asked the question slowly, thoughtfully—

"Where shall I find the strength for this great battle? How shall I, a mere man, accomplish all this you bid me do?"

He paused again. The people listened in breathless expectation, as though the question were quite new, the answer to it never yet heard.

The preacher leaned forward, his dark, piercing eyes fixed on his listeners, his voice giving out the words with a calm, steady impressiveness :—

" 'Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come . . . . offered Himself without spot to God.' *That* is what *He* did. 'Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me.' *That* is what He says to *us*. Oh, my brethren ! (the voice took a tone of infinite pleading) could I only bring you all to this, how happy for me—how happy for you ! Dark times are coming; most of you will have to give up your goods or have them reft from you, anyhow ; give them up *now* ; give them up of free will—nay, more, give *yourselves !* The Holy Church is in sore need ! Will none of you serve in her ranks ? Young men, were you but all as *I* am—could I but bring you all into the net which has caught me ! Come *now*, pause not, look not behind you ! flee from the horrors of Sodom ! I see, I see the world in flames, the heavens rolling together ! I see it coming . . . . Flee, lest it be too late !"

His eyes took the expression of one who beholds unseen things ; a prophetic look was in his face, he stretched out his finger as though pointing to coming doom, and poured out terrible words, as of a seer, striking cold the hearts of all who heard him. Women shrieked, fainted, and were carried out ; strong men fell down on their faces to the earth with groans for mercy ; the crowd, to use the expres-

sion of one who has seen them on a like occasion "palpitated, moaned under the words, as the sea under the storm's wild breath." Celt spoke to Celt, and strong excitement took hold on both, communicating itself, like an electric fluid, from the one to the other. The religious feelings of the Breton race, intensified almost to sombre fanaticism among the men of Léon, were stirred to their very depths by the power of this one young man, and he only a peasant's son. But such things are in Brittany.

At last it was over. The spell of the young preacher's words was removed; the effect only remained, to bring forth fruit, or die out, according to the heart-soil in which the words were sown.

The tention was removed, and the people poured out into the open air, to talk over the wonderful sermon, or, in some few cases, muse upon it in silence.

But Christophe did not stir.

He was not asleep this time; he was thinking, or rather, perhaps, feeling deeply. The callous incrustation of eighteen long months had suddenly melted. Commissions and omissions innumerable seemed to have taken hold upon him and dragged him down to the earth; the sin of his father, which he felt as his own, lay like lead upon his soul!

Lying there on the cold stone pavement, alone before the Crucifix, he tried to find words to plead for mercy; to entreat that the terrible fate which was ever dogging his

steps, which, after a short respite, seemed once more to threaten him, might in pity be removed. But his dry lips could not frame a prayer. A horror was upon him. The way seemed closed—all ways save——

What had the preacher said? "Give up all!" But how? What had *he* to give?

Like the memory of another world, similar words uttered by the same voice came back to him from the dim, far-distant past—from the days when he was an innocent child, fresh from his First Communion—"Be a priest!"

The words had sounded terrible then; they were still terrible, but it was in another way. *Then* he had started back as from fetters of iron; *now* he trembled before the idea as of something far too high for such as he. *Then* he was half appalled; *now* he was almost attracted.

"Can it be that it is, indeed, my vocation?" he asked himself,—"Indeed a call from God? And am I flying—have I been flying all these years from the fulfilment of His will, as Jonah did? Is all that has happened a judgment on me for disobedience?"

But the lad's mind was in a whirl, he could not think. A sick faintness stole over him, and he was obliged at last to leave the church in search of food.

"Well, I will seek out Bernèz—if it were, indeed, he," thought the lad, as he feebly pushed open the great swing-door. "I will see Bernèz, and he will tell me."

Then he went into one of the little public-houses with

the traditional bunch of mistletoe over the door, expended some of his slender wages in bread and cider, sat down on the stone bench by the door to break his fast, and again fell into a profound sleep.

"Poor lad, do not wake him," said the kindly *aubergiste*, as she looked at the tired, handsome face, leaning in profound unconsciousness on the little wooden table before the bench. "Poor lad, he looks just worn out!"

So they let him sleep as long as he would, and that was till the spring sun was already sinking into the sea out beyond Roscoff. Then he awoke suddenly, started as he saw how the day had advanced, and going up to the *aubergiste*, who was busy in the public room, asked if she knew where the preacher of that morning's sermon was to be found.

"Dom Guenedon? Nay, I know not, young man. He is a stranger here, and only came to preach at the request of our *vicaire*. They say he left the town immediately after mattins."

"But where has he gone?" asked Christophe, eagerly.

"Nay, I know not. Ask the sacristan—he's just going down the street—he'll know."

But the sacristan did not know either. He thought his reverence had gone to preach at Roscoff, but he was not sure. Anyhow, he had left the town hours ago.

So Christophe left it, too, and tramped to Roscoff, which he reached late that night. But the preacher was not there, nor had he been, neither was he expected. The

lad was too much exhausted to go further, so he sought out a humble lodging, and slept out the rest of the night in profound unconsciousness. And next morning he tramped out of the town again, as he had tramped in, only wanting one thing which he had managed to bring there and had been compelled to leave behind, and that little thing was Hope.

Coming to a place where four ways met, he sat down beneath the finger-post which told him that the three roads he had to choose among led, one to Saint-Pol de Léon, another to Landervisiau, the third to Brest. Which should be taken?

He knew not—he cared not. Everything in this cold world seemed to be against him, and to everything he was indifferent.

The spring seemed to have looked forth, and gone again. The warm sunshine, in which he had sat yesterday before the little inn, had disappeared from the earth. The grey clouds scudded across the sombre sky, the wind moaned across the country, and flying showers drove in his face and wetted him through and through.

Alone, and uncared for, he sat there, without an aim or an object in life; and, while he sat in the pitiless pelting of the bleak shower, the utter misery of his fate seemed to crush down upon him with overwhelming bitterness, and the lad covered his face in the solitude and wept aloud.

BOOK V.

Love's Young Dream.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK V.—LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

MAIDENS AT THE WELL.

"Thither came the village girls,
And lingered talking."

TENNYSON—"*Pelleas and Ettarre.*"

SPRING has breathed on Carnac plain; one can see that by the way in which the little grass-blades are shooting up, green and fresh, around the feet of the changeless menhirs, which neither winter's snow nor summer's sun can alter one whit for better or for worse. Daisies are looking up by thousands from the short, fine turf, pressing their little white-fringed disks and round pink buds against the very face of the grim old stones, crowding in upon the fairy rings, where the Bretons are well persuaded that the korigans foot it on moonlight nights.

What balls they must have had, those little men of the under-world, to judge by the rings which tell of their

presence! Many a score, green as emerald circlets, might you count out there on Carnac plain this early springtime.

And by Carnac village, too, the wearing o' the green is now beginning. Though it is not April yet, though the Paschal moon is not yet full, sunny showers have come as *avant-couriers* of the fickle month, coaxing open the sheaths of the leaf-buds, and showing a glimpse of the little crumpled garments in which the trees are preparing to dress themselves.

Ferns are uncurling their stately green croziers by the well under the plane-trees in the hollow lane, and the moss which tapestries the old stone trough and creeps silently about the foot of the rough little statue of Our Lady, keeping guard above, is becoming the loveliest study in colouring that artist's eye could desire. Such greens, such golds, shading into the most delicate tints of brown and orange, all wrought into such a substance as no velvet, be the pile never so rich, can emulate. Coarse and careless, indeed, must be the eye which does not rest with satisfaction on moss in springtime!

And—oh! daintiest treasure of the opening year—the fair, pale primroses, sweet with such a perfume as no other flower can match; lovely, with a delicate purity which has won them comparison with starlight—these, too, are peeping out timidly from the shelter of last year's fallen leaves—very timidly as yet; just by twos and threes, little peeping

scouts sent before by the sweet yellow sisterhood, just to see whether the rough March winds, with their rudeness and bluster, are really gone. How they smile, these innocent spies, on meeting the radiant welcome of the sunbeams, which are chequering the banks of the hollow lane, as they filter through the quickening branches overhead, where a thrush is singing his evening hymn.

Just so looks Carnac spring by spring; just so looked it that springtide near one hundred years ago.

Two maidens were standing by the well—it was the village gossiping-place, where the women met when the day's work was over to exchange news while the pitchers were filling—one tall, strong, and fully formed; the other small, slight, and almost childlike.

The little one had filled her pitcher, and was leaning against the smooth bole of a beech-tree, her little sabotted feet lightly crossed below the blue hem of her short petticoat, her hands behind her back, the sunbeams twinkling on her tall white cap and snowy chemisette, on the knot of primroses in her black velvet bodice, on her delicate wild-rose face and the yellow ripples of her sunny hair. Carnac caps are more coquettish than those of Morlaix, and do *not* prevent you seeing that the wearers have hair. A lovely little figure it was, and a sweet little face—soft, dreamy, and yet sunshiny withal, as is a sweet spring morning. Seventeen years, perhaps, had gone over it, not more; some might have guessed less, so childlike was the sweet young face.

The other maiden, filling her red earthenware pitcher at the slow-running spout of the wayside well, looked fully four years older. Indeed, young as was her pleasant face, with its kindly grey eyes and healthy sunburnt colouring, no one would have hesitated to call her a woman. There are some girls who are women always, almost from childhood, while others scarcely seem, even in age, to have attained their full completeness.

"And so the young seigneur has come to Coëtmor?" said the elder maiden, as she stooped to see if the pitcher was nearing full. "It's many a year since he has been among us. Will he own thee for a foster sister *now*, dost think, Genofa?"

"But, yes, yes, indeed, Yronne," exclaimed the little figure by the beech-tree, with a flush on her fair cheek, and an eager ring in her soft voice. "What would you have, cousin? Didn't we play together as children? Didn't mother nurse him herself? Ah, bah, what art thinking of, Yvonne?"

"But that's so long ago, cousin," returned the other; "so long ago; and they say he's been about Court since then, and has grown a mighty fine gentleman. Honarn Kabik was up at the Château last night with a coat old Perr had been mending for one of Monsieur's valets, and he saw M. le Comte himself walking on the terrace. Fine he was, I can tell thee, as any goldfinch, and handsome as the holy Saint Sebastian up there in the church, at least so said

Honarn; but he never looked up to speak; oh! no, though Honarn was scarce two yards from him as he passed. He just kept walking up and down, with his eyes on the ground, as if nobody were near at all. Yet Honarn played with him, too, in the old days, Genofa.

"Honarn Kabik—who's Honarn Kabik!"

The pretty girl tossed her flower-like head very slightly, as a broom-blossom does in the wind;—did *he* live under the same roof with M. le Comte for years on years as *I* did? Besides—ah, bah, Yvonne, he's so ugly, so ugly; M. le Comte mightn't care to claim acquaintance, even though he *did* remember him—which isn't likely.

"I don't see what ugliness has to do with it," replied the other, bluntly, as she drew aside her full pitcher and put another in its place. "*I* like people to be faithful to old friends, whatever their looks; and if M. le Comte were too fine to toss a word to poor Honarn, be sure he'll have none too good a memory even for you at the farm, Genofa. He'll *speak* to you, of course," she added, as her cousin made an eager exclamation of dissent; "he could scarcely help doing *that;* but as for coming to you on the old terms, there'll be little of that, I'm thinking."

"But he *has*, Yvonne; he *has*, I tell thee," exclaimed Genofa with excited eagerness. "No, no; M. Aymon was never too proud to acknowledge his *friends;* (she stressed the word a little proudly) "he came to our house the very same evening he arrived, and he's been twice since. Thou

shouldst see the present he's brought for mother; the most beautiful cock and hen thou canst imagine! And he hadn't forgotten Christophe either—poor Christophe!"

The half sarcastic look with which Yvonne had been listening passed quickly at the name.

"Ay, Christophe," she said, softly, "poor, poor Christophe; where is he now, dost think, Genofa? Ah! holy Virgin!" (she turned her eyes towards the statue of the Madonna, and fingered her rosary), "blessed Mother, keep poor Christophe, and bring him home once more!"

"Amen!" murmured Genofa, crossing herself.

There was silence for a moment, as when the name of one dead is mentioned; then Genofa, breaking quickly through the little gravity which had settled on her child-face, suddenly laughed and turned a pair of mischievous eyes on her cousin.

"For example; dost think *he'd* remember thy Honarn, Yvonne?"

A quick flush rose to the face of the elder maiden.

"*My* Honarn, Genofa!" she repeated; "what dost mean?"

The mischievous smile curled the other's rosy lips and danced in her eyes at the same time.

"Well, I thought thou wast taking his part so hotly just now, that, perhaps—perhaps—— Ah, ha, cousin Yvonne, dost thou not know that the tailor* would fain arrange a

* The tailors are the match-makers in Brittany.

match on his own account this time—that is, on his son's, thou knowest; and they *do* say there's only one *pênnhêz* in the village that Honarn Kabik will even *hear* of—set him up! He'll find it hard to get a wife, I fancy, *that* one! We'll teach him, beggars mustn't be choosers; won't we, Yvonne? There, never mind, dear; I didn't mean to vex thee; of course, I knew it was all nonsense. To think of him casting his eyes on *my* Yvonne, indeed!"

Saying which, pretty Genofa came to her cousin's side with a kiss and a caress which soon smoothed the vexed look from the broad white brow of Yvonne. It *was* a little hard always to have this little tailor flung at her, just as if he were the only young man in the whole parish with whom it were possible she should match, thought poor Yvonne; and then she chid herself for the unworthy thought, and, taking up her water-pots, wished a kind good evening to her pretty cousin, and turned towards the village, leaving Genofa to carry her pitcher to the farm. But the latter lingered awhile to gather one or two more primroses, and then stood, tying them up with grass, and looking after her tall cousin as she walked up the lane, balancing one pitcher on her head and carrying the other in her hand.

As she neared the turn where two great elm-trees leaned across the lane and mingled their branches in toppling embrace, the mischievous smile came back to Genofa's

eyes; for, behold, there was "P'tit Honarn" himself, lying in wait to help Yvonne with her water-jugs!

I am afraid the poor little tailor's reception was none the kinder for the gossip which was still rankling in the girl's bosom, or for the strong suspicion that Genofa's blue eyes had witnessed the meeting. How was it that P'tit Honarn was always so provokingly maladroit?

CHAPTER II.

"THE THATCH WHERE HE WAS REARED AND THE VOICE OF HIS BROTHERS."

"So all life's sunshine is flecked with shade,
So all delight is touched with pain;
So tears of sorrow and tears of joy
Welcome the wanderer home again."
WILLIAM SAWYER—"*A Year of Song.*"

OUT on the plain the tall shadows of the menhirs were lengthening and strengthening, as the spring sun sloped westward and flung its long, red beams across the daisied sward.

Very still it was out there. The little shepherds had all gone home, each driving his lowing herd, or his one solitary cow, as the case might be, home for the milking; and only the peaceful bleat of the few sheep which still remained behind, and the regular *browse—browse* of strong teeth nibbling the sweet herbage, as they moved slowly along where the grass was greenest—showed that living beings there were still on this mysterious and legend-haunted plain. Mysterious, indeed, it was, not only because of the everlasting presence of those tall, still stones, of which none could rightly tell the origin, but because, if you

stood there to listen, you might hear, breaking softly through the stillness of the quiet evening hour, strange sounds such as were not made by any living beings, properly so called—of that be very sure.

What was that noise, as of breathing, away to the southwards,—ometimes soft and regular, as of a child asleep—sometimes drawing loud hissing breaths, like one in mortal illness? The sea? No; the Breton shepherd of these plains would hardly have allowed you such a natural explanation. Rather, he would tell you that it is Mor-Vyoc'h, the sea cow, who once came on land and appeared to Widow Madek's little daughter, but has now gone back to chew the cud and draw her breath under the salt waves of her native element.

And, hark to that sigh coming nearer, growing to a wail, and dying away, still moaning, into silence. What is that?—The wind?

No, no; that is a soul in pain; that is poor Wilherm, who, after having lived a life of scandal to all good Christians, carried his impiousness so far as to leave the souls of his mother, wife, and sister without Mass or prayer, and was twisted to death in a wringing match by the phantom washerwomen of the night!

It was not, however, any inhabitant of the under world who appeared presently in sight, coming across the plain from the direction of Auray. The sun was still above the horizon, and whatever you might hear there was small

chance of seeing anything uncanny as long as his bright red beams were there to dispel sights unholy.

No, the new-comer was only a tall strong lad in the costume of a miller, with shoes bearing testimony to long travel on stony roads.

The short cool grass seemed pleasant to his feet, for he stopped to kick off his wooden shoes, took them in his hand, and came along bare-footed. When he reached the cluster of gigantic menhirs which stand together on the plain some two miles or less from Carnac, he paused again, walked straight up to the tallest giant of the group, lifted his black felt hat so that the crimson light from the shining west fell full on his long dark locks, looked up for one moment, then knelt down in the long shadow of the menhir.

For a while he seemed to pray; then, if you had watched, you would have seen him lean forward and press his lips to the inanimate stone, sign himself and it with the cross, then rise again, and stand with right hand raised and eyes fixed upon the sinking sun.

Blood-red it glowed upon the horizon, throwing blood-red lights upon the grey stones, upon the motionless figure and set features of the lad, and turning to purple-blue the wide green sea of grass which stretched around. Blood-red it sank from sight, glittered a moment like a burning ruby, lessened to a fiery spark, and vanished.

Then the lad heaved a great sigh, let his hand

sink, and the fixed look of stern concentration relaxed from his face.

"By a menhir it was committed," he murmured half aloud; "by a menhir—my menhir—let the atonement be made; that is if ——"

He broke off hurriedly, as if only just conscious that the words had been uttered aloud, glanced quickly round, put on his hat again, and struck across the plain towards Carnac.

The twilight was already falling as he entered the village, but of this he seemed rather glad than otherwise, for he walked on the shadowed side of the road whenever he could do so conveniently; avoided the looks of the loiterers by the cemetery-gate and around the village oak, made straight for the open door of the church, and knelt down in the darkest corner of the dim interior.

Softly dusk it was in there, after the red glow of sunset, full of deep brown depths of shadow, from which here and there a little lamp shone like a glow-worm, scarce revealing the few quiet figures who knelt at their evening prayers.

Before the high altar, on which two tapers shone like stars, knelt a priest in a black cassock—his tonsured head bent down, and his face hidden in his hands. But he was in private, not public prayer.

A young maid, with pure pale face, half catching the faint light from the altar, knelt before the Great Crucifix,

her eyes uplifted to the suffering Form, her elbows resting on the back of her *priedieu* chair, and the rosary hanging from her clasped hands. Her white nun-like cap, with its snowy lappets falling back, did not even tremble, so still she knelt, so wrapped was she in prayer and contemplation; but if you had bent down very closely, you might have heard the name of Christophe whispered on her lips. Yvonne Guenedon had been accustomed to pray for him in childhood, and she was not one who ever forgot.

But that name was on another's lips as well, not calmly whispered, as is the name of one so long passed from sight that its utterance awakes no vibrating thrill of emotion, but breathed in painful fervour, with the suffocation of a half-stifled sob.

This one was a woman also, with the first light footsteps of those crowding years which, when life's sun has passed the line, tread heavier and yet more heavily upon brow and hair. But she was fair still, and probably, but for "fretting," need not have felt those footprints yet.

Year by year Ninorc'h Comorre confessed that "fretting," as her besetting sin, was absolved, and enjoyed peace for a time; but year by year the nagging demon attacked her again, first in one shape then in another, and she fell again.

Now it was that Antonn, her good man, was too careful of his money, then too careless; now her favourite cow

dropped its calf, then some beggar cast an evil eye on her dairy, and spoilt a whole churning of cream. Three real sorrows she had had, indeed; though her neighbours were wont to say that the third, at least, was a blessing in disguise. The loss of her first-born child, the deprivation of the one adopted in its place, and, last of all—and this was but lately—the death through drowning of the poor innocent, her last born. True, it happened very quietly, and there could have been no pain. Seemingly he had gone to sleep on the edge of a little pond out there on Carnac plain, and had turned over, so that his face had rested in a little mossy pool by the edge. So at least he had been found, sleeping apparently, as he had done many a time before at the same place, like a little child. It was long ere his mother could believe that he was dead, so calm was the expression of the innocent foolish face. The mother mourned him sorely still, and this loss it was which had renewed her longing after Christophe, never quite at rest since he was taken from her at the festival of the Dead, four years ago last November.

She was kneeling this evening before the little shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, close by the place where knelt the stranger youth; and, as she knelt, the tears welled slowly from her eyes and words came audibly from the trembling lips:

"Christophe! my son Christophe! my little Christ-sent child! Oh! Mother of Sorrows! bring him back to me,

if still he lives! Christophe, Christophe! Ah! God! why didst Thou take him from me?"

She did not heed the wayfaring lad who knelt so near her in the shadow that the whispered words of her complaint fell distinctly on his ear. She never saw how he trembled beneath them, or how his strong features worked at the sight of her falling tears. The grave, somewhat sternly-set lips under the budding moustache, took a softer expression than they had known for long, and tears of sympathy glittered on his long eye-lashes. He made a movement as though to place himself at her side, but drew back again into the shadow, as she rose from her knees and went out.

After a moment's hesitation, however, he followed her. Through the church-door they passed, into the soft, spring gloaming; she in front, he some half dozen yards behind her. Overhead, the rose-flush of the after-glow was fading from the sky, giving place to that solemn, ethereal, bluish tint which heralds the stars. Some of them were glinting out already, not exactly shining, it was not quite dark enough yet for that, but glimmering as through a veil. Behind the budding trees, a large planet was sending a faint silver light over the path it would presently tread, and in the willows, by the grave-yard gate, a thrush was singing so loudly, so clearly, so tunefully, that her notes sounded far down the village street. It was to the grave-yard that Ninorc'h Comorre

was going, and not till she reached the gate did she make an instant's pause, nor even then did she look behind her to see who was following her through the wicket, which, having unlatched, she had not tarried to latch again. Straight on she went to the burying-ground of her people, and down she knelt on the damp turf between the graves of her children.

Long she knelt, telling her beads "with intention" for the dead, and ere she rose another prayer had been put up for the lost; then, with a sigh, she stood up to go. Who was it that echoed the sigh beside her? She looked round hastily, but could see no other kneeler, at least by the neighbouring graves. The shadows had deepened fast since her entrance; there was but little starlight as yet.

"Mother!"

Ninorc'h gave a smothered cry as she heard that name. Often she had longed, kneeling by those graves, that her children could come back and speak to her from the spirit-world where they had gone. But there is a something in our human nature which shrinks with an invincible horror from the thoughts of contact with a spirit which has put off the garment of humanity, and crossed the awful boundary which is, as a great gulf, fixed between life here and hereafter. This shrinking came upon Ninorc'h, as she heard herself called by that name.

"Mother!"

There it was again, and this time the terrified woman saw a dark form come from the deeper shadow which lay beneath a clump of silver-tipped willow trees.

"Holy Virgin, keep me! *What* is it?" she exclaimed, with lips dry through terror, scarcely knowing what she said. How appalling, then, was the answer which she had little thought to call forth.

"It is I, mother—your son!"

"What! Maio? But, no; it is too tall."

The lad saw her exceeding terror, remorse struck him for his want of foresight, and he hastened, as he thought, to re-assure her.

"No, mother, dear, no; it is Christophe, your son, Christophe!"

But she flung up her arms with a cry, half of added terror, half of wild despair.

"Christophe! No, *not* Christophe? My God, this is too much! Then he is dead, too—dead, too——"

The words died away in a wail, and she tottered, as though about to fall. But a strong arm was flung about her—warm hands—living hands—seized her cold ones and held them tight, while a voice, trembling too much with tears, joy, love, and remorseful tenderness—all mingled in one overmastering emotion—to come from lips no longer warm with the blood of life, smote on her ear:—

"No, not dead! not dead, mother! not dead, but come back, come *home*, if thou wilt have me! Don't cry, don't

tremble, mother! Really it is I—thy son Christophe. Wilt not kiss me? Art not glad to see me? Oh, Mère Ninorc'h!"

Mère Ninorc'h—his pet name for her, the name he had called her by from the days when he was a tiny, toddling child—it fell on Ninorc'h's ear with a soothing, calming, comforting sound, making her heart beat, no longer with fear, but with trembling joy. She took her hands from his, and clasped them about the neck of the tall form, whose features were hidden from her by the surrounding shadows, hiding her face on his breast, and sobbing for very joy——

"Christophe, Christophe! my son, my son!"

It was all she could say, for the sobs stifled speech; but it was quite enough for the lad. His heart hungered and thirsted after the love so long fasted from: the longing for that, and the great need which had grown on him to lay his soul bare to Bernèz, in whom he had felt the magnetic attraction of comprehension—these had drawn him home at last. How he had longed, how dreaded to cross the well-remembered threshold, he would have found it hard to tell. Dread to find its door closed to him: dread to find the hearth-circle thinned, or the old love grown cold, had strengthened into a strong fear as he approached the country he knew so well; but the mother's heart had been his all along, and the certainty of this fell on his soul with the soothing power of a great

content. Dread died. Others might have changed, but their change was but a secondary matter, so long as *this* heart—this tender mother's heart which now beat on his—was still his own.

"Christophe, come home!"

She raised herself from his breast, took his hand in hers, and led him from the grave-yard, down the hollow lane, and under its o'er-arching trees, neither speaking a single word. *She* could not; *he* would not, lest news of change should trouble his great content.

Yet, as they drew nearer to the old gray farmstead, under whose thatch he had been reared, the questions he had not cared to put in that first draught of perfect joy, began to rise and trouble his soul with vague forebodings.

His foster-father, how would *he* receive him—the beggar's brat come back again? And Genofa, little Genofa, did she still live? Surely *hers* was not that new-made grave in the village cemetery?

He turned with the question upon his lips, but it died away; he *could* not put it. They neared the house. It was starlight now; the trees which stood around it rose against the sky in shadowy masses. Those trees—the tall beeches, the taller poplars, and the crooked elm, in the fork of whose branches he had so often sat as a boy, and pelted Genofa with scaly catkins—how well he knew them! There they were, just the

same as ever, standing out against the pale evening sky, and stretching their branches around the dear old home, under whose eaves the wrens and the swallows loved to build.

A dog barked in the farmyard behind the house, lept the wall, and ran up to Ninorc'h, wagging its tail. Yes, that was old Caleb, young still in the days when Christophe had gone away, yet the very same sturdy guardian of his master's property. Would he know him?

Almost without thinking, the lad fixed on this acknowledgment on the part of the dumb beast as a sign from which he might augur his reception by its owners.

Would he recognise him?

Christophe's heart beat with anxiety as the dog came round to his side, snuffed at his heels, hesitated, snuffed again, and finally looked up and waved his tail, without growling, as he was wont to do, even in his mistress's presence, at a perfect stranger. So far so good. Christophe could have embraced his ancient playfellow for very gratitude. As they entered the garden-gate, some one opened the house-door, letting out a flood of ruddy fire-light into the gloom.

"Well, wife, so thou't back!" exclaimed a strong, hearty voice. "We're all as hungry as a pack of wolves. The young ones were for beginning supper without thee, but I would not hear of that. *Oui-dà*, who'st got with thee, wife?—a guest? You're welcome, sir, whoever

you are, if so be the good wife brings you. Come in, come in."

And before Ninorc'h, who had been crying quietly all the way, could command her voice to speak, Antonn Comorre had stepped back a pace, and stood, holding the door, for the pair to enter.

This they did, still without a word, Ninorc'h still holding the lad's hand, and leading him up to the great open fireplace, where a pile of glowing logs sent a warm red light over the low room, lighting up the furniture of the old homely farm-kitchen where he had been nursed as an infant and had played as a child.

How familiar it all was. The dark oak beams stretching above, wattled in-between with brown-barked hazel-rods, and hung with huge sides of smoked bacon. The *lits clos* ranged along the two sides of the walls, with the sacred monogram cut in open work on the folding-doors, which had shut in many a sleeper of the Comorre family, now sleeping still more soundly in the village grave-yard. The chests and presses, dark with age and rich with carving, where the good-wife had already stored up a goodly plenishing of home-spun linen against Genofa's wedding day. The great arm-chairs, facing each other in the chimney-corners, for the good-man and good-wife: the long table in the embrasure of the window, spread for supper with snowy napery, on which shone four brass basins, polished till they glittered like a

richer metal in the red fire-shine. The farm-tools ranged in a corner by the door, where Antonn had put them by when he came from work. The Crucifix and holy-water basin, with a branch of blessed palm, kept since last year, nailed above. The little statue of the Madonna by the bed which used to be Genofa's, with a bowl of primroses, placed like an offering, below. How strangely familiar was all this to the Child of the Menhir: and yet he felt himself among them as a stranger!

Yes, for Antonn continued to gaze at him uncertainly, turning questioning eyes on Ninorc'h; the fair girl, pouring milk into the basins on the supper table, turned as he entered, and made her little reverence as to one quite unknown—and yet, she *must* be Genofa. Yes, though she had grown from a child into a maiden, he would have known her, he thought, anywhere; yet she knew not him.

And who was that handsome, richly-dressed youth, in the place of honour by the fire?—who half rose as he entered, and then, guessing by his garb, the low degree of the new-comer, sat down, with something of the superb disdain of the nobles of his day, and played idly with the links of his gold chain as he watched the group? That oval face, those delicately-cut features, those careless brown eyes—did he not know them also? Ah, yes, surely this was his foster brother, Aymon de Kerdec'h. No recognition in his eyes either! Christophe called to

mind the Breton proverb which this same young aristocrat had so tenderly quoted to him when they had parted :—

"*The wren always loves the thatch where he was reared, and the voice of his brothers.*"

And sighed heavily. Not five years yet, and he who had been known as a brother, a son, was already forgotten. Oh! the blankness and pain of finding that they who have loved and cherished, now know us no more!

"Well, sir, and may I know your name?" asked Antonn, at last, seeing that his wife did not speak.

The lad turned an entreating look on Ninorc'h, who went up to her husband, and put Christophe's hand, which she still held, into his, saying, in a voice which quivered with emotion :

"Husband, husband, dost not know him? It's our son—our lost Christophe!"

"*Christophe!* Ayo! Good heavens, can it be true? Turn to the light, lad, that I may see thee!"

Saying which the honest farmer took the lad by the two shoulders and wheeled him round till the fire shone full upon his face.

"By Saint Corneille, and so it is! But grown into a man, and a fine one, too! No wonder I did not know thee, lad. And yet to think I should not! Welcome home, my son—welcome home!" and with truly Celtic

fervour, the honest man took the tall lad in his arms and gave him a right fatherly embrace. But the revulsion was too great; Christophe put his head down on the broad shoulders of the man who had nurtured his helpless childhood, and the pent emotion found vent in one long-drawn sob.

"Christophe! Holy Virgin, Christophe!" exclaimed Genofa, and having put down her milk-pan, she also pressed forward to welcome the long-lost brother; but a rose-flush came to her delicate face as the tall youth raised his head from her father's shoulder and stretched out his hands for hers; and there was a moment's pause and hesitation on both sides, ere the kiss of greeting was given and received.

A thrill, such as he had never felt before, passed through him, as he stooped and touched with his lips the warm delicate brow under the halo of yellow hair; while she palpitated under his kiss like a little bird, and, having received it, retired into the shadow and busied herself again with the supper. Then the young seigneur, who had risen and was waiting his turn, also came forward with his greeting, and, sensitive as Christophe was, he could find nothing to complain of in the warm grasp of the white, aristocratic hand, and the hearty words with which he was again greeted as "brother!"

CHAPTER III.

AT SUPPER.

"We sat and talked until the night,
Descending filled the little room;
Our faces faded from the light,
Our voices only filled the gloom.

We spake of many a vanished scene,
Of what we once had thought and said,
Of what had been, and might have been,
And who was changed, and who was dead."

LONGFELLOW—"*The Fire of Driftwood.*"

"AND where is Matelinn Gourven?" asked Antonn Comorre, when, a fifth basin of milk having been added for Christophe, the little party were seated at supper.

The farmer was busy dividing the hot rye-bread, which Genofa had just served up in a clean, fringed napkin, placed within a sort of basket-like wicker dish; and he did not perceive the look of trouble which darkened the lad's face as he heard the name. Getting no answer, however, he repeated his question, thinking he had not been heard.

"Well, lad, where's Matelinn? Not in the village I hope?"

The lad tried to answer, choked, and tried again with better success.

"I don't know."

The answer was short enough when it *did* come, and Antonn greeted it with a laugh.

"Oh, ho! Run away hast thou, lad? Thou didst not like thy father much, then—eh?"

A deep red flush rose to the lad's brow, and, fading, left him deadly pale.

"No."

No answer could be shorter than that, none less encouraging to further inquiry. But Antonn Comorre, kindly as he was, was not a man of the finest perception, and he persevered.

"No love lost between father and son, belike," he continued, with a well-pleased smile.

"Well, it must be hard to keep the Fifth Commandment with Matelinn for its object, and I've no doubt thou canst get absolution for the past and dispensation for the future, my lad; so never take it to heart. Thou'st a home here, and a father, too, so long as thou want'st them. But tell us, lad, what was the final straw?"

Spite of the kindly words, for a moment Christophe almost regretted his return. Shame seemed to cover him from head to foot. A nameless terror tingled in his veins, and the food which he tried to swallow seemed about to choke him, when, to his inexpressible relief, Count Aymon, with the tact of his high breeding, perceived his embarrassment, and adroitly turned the conversation.

"By the by, I forgot to tell you, foster-father, that this is my farewell supper; I'm off to Dinan to-morrow."

"Off to Dinan! Why, lad, you've just come to Coëtmor! What, will you leave us again so soon?"

"Ay, 'tis sadly soon, and sorry I am to go, for I'd hoped that my mother and sister would have joined me here, and that we should have all spent our Easter together. But it was not to be. I received a summons to-day which brooks of no delay. It is another alarm about the brigands."

"The brigands?"

It was Ninorc'h who put the question, and the puzzled look on her face was reflected on those of her husband and Genofa.

"Ay, the brigands. Have you not heard of them? But, no, you are quiet as yet in this little corner, out of the way of the towns, and know little of the convulsions which are shaking France elsewhere. Reality or rumour, it matters little; people begin to think nothing too strange to believe, and the whole air seems like a vast thundercloud."

"But the brigands, M. le Comte?" asked Genofa, interrupting reflections which she could scarcely follow, and anxious to bring her foster-brother back to what had aroused her curiosity.

"The brigands, my pretty one?" he smiled, half caressingly, half patronisingly at the lovely child's face by his side. "Well, thou knowest that these are hard and

puzzling times for some of our poor folks. They can't understand why bread is still so dear, now the States-General have met and made us a Constitution—a Constitution, my faith!" he laughed, disdainfully. "Well, they're hungry, poor things, and they're tired of all the debating up there in Paris; so some of them have taken matters nto their own hands, and while the King and the nation are settling affairs, they've taken pitchforks, clubs, and what not, and broken into bakers' shops and country-houses, and helped themselves to bread. Poor fellows, it's very wrong, but one can scarcely blame them. It's two years since we had the first alarm, when they made such a to-do in Paris; then things quieted down for a while. But now, true or false, every one begins to cry again that the brigands are coming. My mother is terribly nervous, and has sent for me to help to defend Château Kerdec'h. I really think she and Renée would be better here. We must see how things are."

"But, M. Aymon, surely things are getting to a terrible pass?" said honest Antonn, scratching his head in a puzzled way. "Tell us, is it true what they say, that our good King is as good as a prisoner in his own palace, and that the National Assembly—that's what they call the Government, isn't it?—has things all its own way?"

"Too true, I'm afraid," answered Aymon, with a sigh. "Everything seems tumbling about our ears, and what's to come of it all, is more than I can say."

"I *thought* so; I always *said* so," broke in Antonn, energetically. "I *knew* the good King could have no say in taking our priests from us, and putting in men who've taken the oath to obey the nation. There's Dom Clemẽnz—never was a better, kinder, or holier man! 'Twas he who married me and the good wife there, and baptized all our children. Ay, Ninorc'h, thou mayst well cry; it's something to cry about this, it is. Well, M. Aymon, he got overlooked somehow when the other Curés hereabouts were deprived of their livings; but now they've chased him away too, because he said it was against his conscience to take the oath, and there's a constitutional priest coming in his place. *Ayol,* M. Aymon, here's the Laurel* Sunday coming, and what we're to do I *can't* think. Christians *must* make their *Pâques,* thou knowest, and yet—and yet—I don't know *how* I could take it from the hands of a man who's ousted our Dom Clemẽnz! There's Bernèz, he says it would be a sin."

"Bernèz? Is he here?"

Till now Christophe had taken no part in the conversation, and had scarcely seemed to heed what was said. But there was a feverish eagerness in the way he put this question, which struck the young Count, and attracted his attention.

"No, lad, not now," answered Antonn. "He *was* here up to this evening; but he had warning that he was

* So the Bretons call Easter Day.

watched, and left at sunset. Thou seest, he's staunch to the backbone, is Bernèz, and the authorities don't like him. Then he got into hot water at St. Pol about a sermon he preached there. It made a great stir, they say; and he, being a non-juror, broke the law by preaching at all—at least, so they say. As for me, I understand nothing about these new laws. A priest's a priest, as *I* think, and the Church is the Church; and what the National Assembly has to do with it, *I* don't know. The Horned Angel's* put his hoof in it all—that's my opinion. Why can't they let us Christians alone? We were well enough in old Brittany without all this new law-making. May Old William fly——"

"Hush, hush, husband; what would Dom Clémençz say, if he heard thee?" put in Ninorc'h, warningly; and indeed honest Antonn was waxing unusually vehement. The attack on their most sacred feelings, by depriving them of their priests, was sending a thrill of anger and consternation through all Brittany and the neighbouring provinces, which was soon to bring about serious consequences, and Antonn Comorre did but express the general mind of his countrymen.

"Well, well, wife," he said, hacking savagely at the goat's-milk cheese before him—"there are some things which a Christian can't sit down and take patiently, and meddling with his religion is one of them, I take it. Thou

* The Devil.

shouldst have heard how the lads were talking at the "Salutation" last night. My faith! the Government had better look out, or the parishes will rise some fine day! See if they won't!"

"You think so?" struck in the young Count, leaning eagerly forward—"you think so? Foster-father, you know the people here right well; think you they would rise, supposing a chance should offer of striking an effectual blow for his Majesty and the freedom of the Church?"

Antonn looked up with a peculiar expression.

"Try us, M. Aymon, try us: that's all," he said, significantly, and went on eating.

"Well, the time *may* come," continued the young Count, musingly, "but the apple's not ripe yet, foster-father; we must bide our time. M. Roland's having a try at tinkering up affairs now, or rather, perhaps, it's the fair dame his wife. Let us see how *they* will succeed. Beautiful milk this! Is it from *thy* black cow, pretty Genofa?"

"Certainly, Monsieur," answered the maiden, demurely, "black cow's milk is always the richest, as Monsieur knows. Will he let me fill his bowl again?"

"Monsieur here, Monsieur there! Since when have we grown so ceremonious, sweetest Genofa?" asked the young man in a low voice, as the farmer's pretty daughter, rising, bent over him to pour out the rich yellow milk. "Ah, bah, we must not be so distant *next* time I come.

I shall count the moments till I can look on that flower-face once more. We have none so fair at Court, Genofa."

"Monsieur is pleased to say so," returned the maiden, still demurely, but dimpling nevertheless.

"Eh, and 'tis but the truth," continued the Count, and might have whispered more, but that he caught his foster-brother's eye; so he turned once more to Antonn with talk such as farmers love—of crops and weather, cattle and culture of land.

And thus the evening passed.

"Well, good-night, and good-bye," said Count Aymon, rising at last, on seeing Ninorc'h's housewifely eyes travel to the clock's face for the twentieth time.

"Ay, I know thou art dying to get rid of me, good mother. Early to bed and early to rise was always thy motto, I remember of old. There—no excuses with me. God keep thee, good mother: farewell, sweet Genofa don't *quite* forget me: Christophe, old lad, I'm glad to see thee back. Thou hast a right strong arm, lad, and we may want it yet for the good cause. *Chut*, foster-father, let us but whisper these things as yet. Thou mayst get into trouble with the authorities by sending them thus wholesale to Old William, though they *do* say that half the advanced patriots are ceasing to believe in him among other things—terrible, isn't it? Well, adieu, adieu!"

He stood with the door open to finish his speech, then waved his white hand and was gone, leaving Antonn to

shut it after him. The farmer did so, locking it carefully, a precaution he often used to omit in the old times; then came thoughtfully back to the fire, and stood for some minutes looking into it, lost in meditation. Then he turned slowly and put both horny hands on to the shoulders of the lad Christophe, who was sitting in the chimney-corner, watching his movements with wistful eyes.

"Lad, lad," he said, in a voice deep with feeling, "these be troublous times, but they have brought us one good thing this day, and that's *thee*, lad. The good God has taken little Maio from us, as thou mayst have heard, but He's brought thee back to fill his place, as He did when we lost our little first-born, when thou wast brought as an infant to our doors. Welcome home to bed and board, my son Christophe."

Thus the wanderer had his welcome, full, warm from the heart of both adopted parents; and as he sank to sleep in a bed redolent of fresh hay and lavender, in the little loft with its gable-window, which had been his as a boy, a feeling of dumb thankfulness wrapped him round, body and soul—a feeling all the more sweet perhaps, that he was too utterly weary to give it outward expression.

CHAPTER IV.

GENOFA.

"Like golden blossoms of the broom, or wild-rose sweet and small—
Like wild-rose in a heath-brake, shone my fair among them all:
All the time the Mass was serving I had only eyes for her,
And the more I gazed upon her, the more love my heart did stir."
—"*Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*"

THOSE weeks before Easter were very happy ones for Christophe. Bernèz, being no one knew where, he was able to let that consultation stand over for a time with a clear conscience; and, it must be confessed, that now he was once more in the sweet haven of home, with home love and comforts around him, the resolution, taken outside in storm and peril, gradually withdrew into the background of his thoughts. The priest's black *soutane* which had then appeared as a robe consecrated by a profession almost too high for him to aspire to, under which he might hide a sin which was weighing him to the ground, now seemed again like a pall, covering dead hopes, and youth nipped in the bud.

Not that he *consciously* abandoned his resolution; no, he only postponed it, and lived meanwhile in the sunshine of the present, and of a presence which grew sweeter and brighter day by day.

Could any maid be sweeter than Genofa? Christophe used to ask himself this, as he watched the lovely child going about her household work; and happy, indeed, did he feel himself when she allowed him to carry her pitcher from the well, or bring in the logs from the wood-stack for her to light the fire. Such a sweet little sister surely no one ever had before!

So he said to himself; and yet he did not feel in her presence all that easy calm which brothers usually feel with sisters; and the girl herself had a shy timidity with him which she was not wont to show with others, and yet which did but give her an added charm.

Mademoiselle Marie, with her dark, piquant beauty, was soon quite eclipsed for Christophe by the fair loveliness of this child with the dreamy eyes and yellow hair, whom he so fondly called his "little foster-sister."

"And so thou didst not know me, little sister," said the lad, coming behind her, as she sat spinning by the door, some days after his arrival, with the afternoon sun filtering through the elm-branches on her white cap and yellow hair. The first shyness had a little worn off by that time, and the lad's tongue was becoming freer.

"No, Christophe," answered Genofa, starting a little, as his shadow fell upon the daisied grass-plot where stood her wheel.

"And yet I should have known *thee* anywhere!"

He said it half to himself, with a little sigh.

"Shouldst thou?" She just glanced up with a little pleased smile, and then looked down again at her work.

"Yes, anywhere."

"Yet it is nearly five years since thou went'st away. Surely I must have changed? *Thou* hast!"

"Yes. Yet, if one *cares*, one does not forget."

She did not answer this time, but span her wheel round rather faster, and drew out a long thread between her slender fingers.

"Genofa"—began Christophe again, after a little pause—"dost think *every one* will have forgotten me? There're many of the neighbours were kind to me when I was a boy. I *ought* to go and see them, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"It's so hard to be stared at as a stranger!"

She looked up at him with a pitying look in her soft clear eyes.

"Poor Christophe!" she said, gently; then, as though feeling herself to blame, she added quickly, "I'm so sorry, but I didn't *really* forget, thou knowest; it was only the surprise, and—and——"

"And what?"

A flush rose to her soft cheek.

"I had thought of thee only as a *boy*, and now—why, Monsieur Aymon is less of a man than thou art!"

She said it half shyly, half roguishly, with a quick glance up and then down again.

More of a man than Monsieur Aymon! Christophe smiled, well pleased, and a thrill of gratification passed through him. He was, at all events, boy enough still to appreciate the girl's little innocent compliment.

"Yes, and ever so much graver, and ever so much—how shall I say it? Christophe—" (she lowered her voice and looked round with a half-startled glance)—"Christophe, didst ever see a poulpican or a korigan, or—or a *soul?* Old Etienne's son did, and he had a look in his eyes, ever after, something like thou hast."

This was not so pleasant. The gratified expression died out of the dark face, and a look of trouble came into his eyes. He made no answer, but the hand which rested on the back of Genofa's chair trembled so that she felt the movement, and looked round hastily.

"Holy Virgin, protect us!" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of his face, while a scared look came into her own, and she crossed herself rapidly. "What have I said, Christophe? Don't look like that. Thou hast not seen one *really*, hast thou?"

"Nonsense," he said, almost roughly, "what should make thee think so?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she murmured, "Dom Cleménçz would be angry if he heard me, I know. He always says it is a sin for me to think so much about the—thou knowest *what*—and to be so frightened; for that

the good God is more powerful than the demon, and can keep us all safe. But—oh! Christophe, if I ever saw a soul, I should *die*—I know I should!"

She shuddered so as nearly to overset her spinning wheel, then jumped up hastily and went in-doors. The lad followed her.

"Where art going, Genofa?"

"To the well; it's time the water was fetched."

She called this out of an inner room where Ninorc'h kept her cooking utensils and stores, and presently emerged with a pitcher in each hand. Without a word, Christophe took one from her and walked by her side through the home enclosure into the hollow lane. He looked thoughtful and moody, and the girl on her part did not try to break the silence, but just glanced timidly into her companion's face once or twice, as they walked under the great boughs of the over-hanging trees. It was as when a little shadow falls across the sunshine; as when a cloud, no bigger perhaps than a man's hand, climbs up from the glowing horizon into a sky of stainless blue. What coming event did the shadow forecast? Was the cloud but a passing shade, or the herald of mist and rain?

Neither youth nor maiden asked themselves any such question, but they felt the difference.

Yet what shadow could remain long on such a day, in such a place, and with such a companion?

Standing there beneath the beech-trees, leaning against the same smooth bole where Yvonne had stood a few evenings before, listening to the thrushes, feeling the primrose-scented air fanning his cheek, and watching that dainty little figure stooping over her pitcher by the mossy old well, Christophe could not keep his vexation long. A smile grew gradually upon his grave face, and a tender look rose into his dark eyes.

"Genofa," he said, presently, "dost remember 'twas just here we said good-bye?"

"Was it? Ay, so it was! I had forgotten," answered Genofa, looking up from the well.

His face clouded again.

"Forgotten, forgotten," he muttered, moodily. "'Tis always so! Ah, Genofa, thou dost soon forget!"

But she made no reply to the reproach, for, as he spoke, the nearly-filled pitcher slipped, fell, and all the contents went to water the primroses and hart's-tongue on the bank.

"Holy Virgin! she exclaimed, picking up the pitcher and stooping anxiously over it to see that it was unharmed. "What if I had broken it! It's mother's old favourite! And all the good water spilt, too! There's little enough to be got just now; we haven't had rain for a whole week. Heavens! I do believe there's a little bit chipped out of the spout! What *will* mother say?"

So absorbed was the child over her damaged pitcher

that she did not see an old, bent, white-haired man, leaning on the arm of a young girl, turn into the lane behind her, out of the smaller one which led from the *landes*.* Christophe, however, had his face that way, and seeing that the old man nodded to him, he doffed his hat in return, but looked at the pair with eyes which showed no sign of recognition. An eager look had come into the girl's open, honest countenance as she caught sight of him, and she half held out her hand; but seeing that they were not recognised, she withdrew it quickly, the light died in her face, and she went on up the lane with the old man, and was soon lost to sight round the turn leading to the village.

"Who was that, Genofa?" asked the lad, turning to his companion, when the pair had passed from view.

She had now again placed her pitcher under the mossy spout, more securely this time, and turned to answer him by another question.

"Who? Did some one go by?"

"Why, yes; didst not see them?—an old man with long white hair, and a tall girl with a face like—like—I was going to say like an ox-eye daisy, but I think it was more like that of our Lady up there."

He pointed to the figure of the Virgin, which some native artist had cut and placed over the old well. It had been carved probably after some village model; for

* Heath lands.

the features were of the Celtic type, and the mould the homely one of a country maiden. But the artist, unskilled as he might be, had given to his otherwise rough workmanship an expression of noble strength, of tender womanhood, which raised that face above the common faces of this work-a-day world. A touch of heaven was there.

"Like our Lady?"

Genofa turned her blue eyes in the direction of the lad's finger, and studied the stone effigy with an attention which, well-known as it was, she had, perhaps, never bestowed upon it before.

"So it is!" she exclaimed, presently; "I never thought of it before, but she *is* like that;"

"Who?"

"Why, Yvonne, of course! Never say thou didst not know her!"

"But how dost *thou* know it was Yvonne?"

"Why, didst thou not tell me she was like our Lady up there? There's no one else in our village with a look like *that*. And then she was with an old man; that was Perik Guenedon, of course; he never stirs out without Yvonne, and she's seldom seen without him."

"Yvonne!"

He repeated the name, dwelling on it thoughtfully, and turning his eyes in the direction whither its owner had disappeared.

"Why didst thou not speak to them?" asked Genofa, in a wondering voice. "They used to be among thy best friends, those two, and she's my cousin."

He did not reply, but the colour rose to his face.

"Why didst thou not greet them?" repeated the girl; "they'll take it unkind, I fear. I *wish* I'd seen them. Why, Christophe," she went on, with a merry laugh, after a moment's examination of his face—"why, Christophe, I do believe thou hadst forgotten them, *thou!* Come, say, is't not true?"

He coloured yet more deeply, and was beginning an excuse, but she caught him up, with childish delight at being thus in a position to turn the tables on him.

"Forgotten, forgotten," she repeated in mimicry of his voice. "Ah, Christophe, thou dost soon forget!"

He looked really vexed.

"But I haven't seen her for so long," he answered, "and she's grown into quite a woman; while as for Perik Guenedon, I had no notion he was so old."

"No, no, Christophe, *that* won't do," laughed the girl with all her shyness gone. "Never talk to *me* again about forgetting. Ah, ah, if one *cares,* one doesn't forget —isn't that it, *Monsieur!* Much *thou* must have cared about Perik Guenedon and poor Yvonne!"

She laughed again—a merry, ringing laugh, which mingled pleasantly with the thrush's clear whistle and the bubbling of the water in the old well. But the most

tuneful laugh sounds not pleasant in the ears of him against whom it is directed, and Christophe, already vexed at a mistake which must have hurt his old friends, looked thoroughly annoyed.

Genofa saw it, and desisted.

"Well, never mind," she said, taking up her water-jug and turning to go,—"never mind, thou canst go to their cottage this evening and make it up. What!" (with another sly smile) "has thy memory *quite* gone? Thou'st forgotten my pitcher next! I shall have to come back and fetch both it and thee!"

CHAPTER V.

YVONNE.

"And I looked on for his coming, as a prisoner through the grating
Looks and longs and longs and wishes for its opening day.
* * * * * * * * *
And he stooped to kiss his father, and he stooped to kiss his mother,
But till I said, 'God greet thee, sir,' he quite forgot me."

—JEAN INGELOW.

FORGOTTEN! He had forgotten her! he, the poor motherless and worse than fatherless lad, whom she had held in her womanly heart with such tender pity—whose name had been in her prayers since the days when they had played as children together—he had forgotten her!

Yvonne's heart was very sad, as she went homewards up the lane, carefully leading her old grandfather.

Yvonne had been older than Genofa when the lad went away, older even than he by several months, and she had memories connected with him which the younger girl had not. They had been confirmed together—together, too, they had knelt at their First Communion, and it was into her ear alone, as they sat on the plains in the old childish days of cattle-herding, that the proud, shy lad had ever spoken aught of what he suffered from his nameless origin and equivocal position. There had been a motherly feeling in

her attitude towards him which gave to her recollections a strength and tenderness not often attained at an age so young as hers had been when they parted. She had never forgotten him, and her joy when she heard of his return had been deep and real. She had looked hourly towards the time when he would come to the cottage, as in the days of long ago; and if a little wondering misgiving at the delay had begun to arise, she had put it by with the thought that they could not yet spare him from their sight in the old farmhouse which was his home. That he had forgotten her, she had not once dreamt of; and when she had caught sight of him in the lane, only the necessity of her arm to her tottering old grandfather had prevented her from running up to him with both hands out, sure of an answering welcome.

"Ah, there he is! There's Christophe!" she had said gladly to the old man; and old Perik Guenedon, dim of sight, had taken the witness of her young eyes, and been ready with a kindly greeting for the lad he had known as a babe. And he stood there unrecognising! Yvonne's heart, beating with joy and excitement, had suddenly stood still, the tears had started to her eyes, and she had turned away quickly to hide her disappointment, without speaking one of the words of which her heart had been full.

"Was it *not* Christophe, then?" asked the old man, presently, in a bewildered tone, as they went up the lane. Yvonne tried to answer him clearly and gently as usual, but

there was a lump in her throat which made the words hard to say.

"Yes, grandfather, yes; but— he did not know us, grandfather, he did not——"

In spite of herself, a sob burst out.

"What is it, little daughter?" asked the old man, turning his pale eyes with a distressed look towards her face,—"was he rude to my Yvonne? Ah! if my arms were but younger!" A flash of the old fire came into the dim old eyes, and the withered hand clenched itself upon his staff.

'Twas said that Perik Guenedon, gentle as he now was, had been a passionate man in his youth, and a renowned champion of the *pen bas.**

Yvonne hastened to calm him.

"No, no, grandfather, he did nothing, nothing—'twas only that he had forgotten us."

"Forgotten? Ay, ay, so it is with the young—out of sight, out of mind. But do not fret, little daughter, *he's* no cause to be proud—that one; a beggar's brat he is, who can wonder at his manners? There, let me sit down in the arm-chair, Yvonne; and get us our supper, my maid, I grow tired now-a-days full soon. Ay, ay, I'm not what I was, Yvonne."

The Guenedon's cottage was considerably smaller than was the house at Coëtmor Farm; but its furnishings, like those of nearly all Breton dwellings, were very similar.

* Single-stick.

There were the same *lits clos*, with the cross and sacred monogram on the doors; the same carved high-backed chairs and massive chests, clamped with brass; the same earthern floor and raftered roof. But the windows, instead of looking upon a farmyard and grass-plot screened by trees, commanded a view of the village street, with the village graveyard across the way, and the old church coming in at the left hand corner of the picture.

Old Perik Guenedon, from his summer seat in the trellised porch under the climbing roses and honeysuckle, could watch the comings and goings of all the neighbours, and even catch a glimpse of the little wooden cross which marked his old wife's grave, and of the little wooden ark which rested thereon, enclosing the remains of his eldest son. The sight of this last was a source of constant gratification to him, and he was never tired of pointing it out with pride, if a neighbour came to join in a friendly smoke—"For,"—as he was wont to say—"'tis not *every* father who lives to do that for his son!"

Yvonne's favourite place was at the little window which looked down the hollow lane, with its vista of cool greenery, towards Coëtmor. Sitting there she could just see the red-pointed roof of her aunt Ninorc'h's dove-cote, with the weathercock atop, piercing the trees; and if Genofa came in to the village, her cousin from this coigne of vantage could generally catch sight of

her white cap and blue-hemmed petticoat, full five minutes before she appeared at the garden gate.

Yvonne was not sitting there this evening, however, or she would not have started so violently, when, about sundown, the yellow light which streamed through the open door was suddenly cut off, and a shadow fell upon the floor at her feet, as she was stooping over the simmering *pot-au-feu*. "Holy Virgin!" she exclaimed, letting the spoon fall into the steaming contents—"Holy Virgin! Who is it?"

"'Tis I, Mademoiselle Yvonne."

"Christophe!"

She stood up and looked him straight in the face, with a startled gaze; then the colour rose and her eyes fell. He coloured too, all over his dark skin, with a blush of embarrassment.

"Mademoiselle Yvonne," he said, hesitatingly, "I must beg your pardon; I'm so sorry that I did not—did not quite recognise you in the lane just now."

"No?"

Again she raised her honest eyes to his face with a simple questioning. As he had thought of Genofa, so she now thought of him—she would have known him *anywhere*. Her quiet way of taking his excuses embarrassed him still more. She made no excuse for *him*, he could see that It piqued him a little too, and he tried to escape from the difficulty with an awkward attempt at a compliment.

"Mademoiselle Yvonne, say then, is it not a little bit your own fault? Can I help it if Mademoiselle is so grown, so—so *embellished*, that she looks quite another than the quiet little girl she was when I went away? If Mademoiselle——"

But the girl drew herself up, and interrupted him with proud humility.

"You have forgotten," she said, a little coldly, "we do not call each other *Monsieur* and *Mademoiselle* between ourselves in our village. We are simple country people, and all friends, and compliments are not wanted among such. And—and—" her voice faltered a little, "we *used* to be friends in the old days, Christophe!"

At this last appeal, in the voice which now came back to him like the tune of a song heard in childhood, Christophe's awkward embarrassment vanished. He remembered that he was speaking to his kind playmate of the olden time, and not to Mademoiselle Marie, whose coquettish vanity had taught him (only very imperfectly, she would have said), the art of paying compliments. Instead of finishing the sentence she had interrupted, he held out his hands with cordial frankness towards the girl.

"Forgive me, Yvonne," he said, "I had, indeed, forgotten, or I wouldn't have talked that nonsense. You used to be like a little mother to me, the poor orphan, when we were children together. I haven't, at least,

forgotten how good you were, though your face had got a little rubbed out from my memory. But confess, Yvonne, you wouldn't have known me either, if you hadn't seen me with Genofa?"

She looked at him with a soft light in her clear eyes, as she placed her two hands in his,—"Yes, I would, Christophe."

He was touched by her simple earnestness, and by this memory of him, where he had certainly not much thought to find it.

"That is good," he said,"—then thou hast thought of me sometimes, Yvonne?"

In the friendly feeling called up by her words and manner, the old familiar "*thou*" came back to his lips quite naturally. But she perceived it at once; his "*you*," addressed to her, had fallen coldly on her ear. Gladly she followed his lead.

"*Have* I thought of thee, Christophe? Oh, yes! Were we not playfellows? Did we not make our First Communion on the same day? Does one forget those who have shared such things with us? Yes, I have thought of thee,—and in my prayers."

She said the last words very low, yet they reached his ear, and the hot blood mounted to his face. What was *he* that he should be so remembered?—he, who in the black misery which had fallen upon him, had almost forgotten his God!

"God bless thee, Yvonne," he said, in a broken voice; and then they stood for some instants holding each other's hands, he gazing earnestly into the clear, good face of his childhood's friend. But the colour rose there under his fixed look. That called back his thoughts from visions of the by-gone days. Suddenly he dropped her hands—he had forgotten how long he had been holding them.

It might have been an awkward moment for the old playfellows, now children no longer; but at that moment the quavering voice of old Perik Guenedon, from his chair by the fire-side, broke the silence which had become just a trifle oppressive. He had evidently been asleep and had just awakened to the presence of a stranger.

"Who is it, Yvonne? Who is it?" he asked, leaning his white head forward and peering at Christophe with his pale blue eyes.

She made a sign to the lad to put his hand into that of the old man.

It's Christophe, grandfather," she said, in her clear tones—"Christophe! who has come back among us again. Thou art glad to see him, is it not so, grandfather?"

"Christophe! Why, I thought he had grown too fine for such as we," answered the old man with some asperity. "Why, lad, have thine eyes grown old like mine that thou didst not see us just now in the lane?"

Yvonne had hoped that he would have forgotten this former meeting; for the old man's mind was apt to let

trifles of recent date slip quickly from it. But no, he had felt the incident as a slight to his "little daughter," as he called Yvonne, and it rankled accordingly. But the girl was quick with her explanations.

"Never mind, grandfather, he's come to see us now—on purpose to see us—so thou must not scold him. There, that's right! And now he's going to stay to supper with us, to make it *quite* like old times. Is it not so, Christophe? Dost remember how we used to run in like hungry wolves—thou, Genofa, and I—after a day's herding, and how grandmother used to lift up her hands on seeing how much we ate? Ah, yes, those were happy days!" She sighed a little, as she set another place at the round oak table.

"Do I remember?" chimed in Christophe, heartily—"I should think so. Madame Guenedon was famed for her *pot-au-feu*. Wasn't it savoury and good, and weren't Genofa and I delighted when we were asked in for a share? We didn't get our supper so early up at the farm."

"No, we were always early folks. But my *pot-au-feu* won't compare with grandmother's, this evening, for it's *not* savoury. 'Tis a fast-day, to-day, as thou knowest, so we have only milk-soup."

"Never mind, milk-soup is not to be despised, and it smells delicious. Ah! Yvonne, *I* have no cause to be particular! If thou couldst only know how meagerly I have fared at times since I left Carnac!"

Yvonne looked interested, but the lad did not volunteer many particulars, and, soon after supper, he rose to take his leave. "And thou wilt come back?" she said, as she bid him good night.

"Oh, yes! I don't think of leaving the farm just yet a bit. Good night, Père Guenedon!" He called back the salutation more for form's sake than anything, for the old man was already more than half asleep again; then he nodded once more to Yvonne, and was round the turn of the lane in a trice. The time already seemed long which was spent away from Genofa.

And Yvonne?

She knelt that night before her Crucifix, with a happy smile on her pure good face; and when, amongst her bede-roll of names, she came to that of Christophe, she paused upon it with a feeling of innocent pleasure, which she would have found it hard to analyze, but which resolved itself into thankfulness.

CHAPTER VI.

TAP! TAP!

"Adieu, monsieur le recteur, maintenant je vais à la joie.'

—*Breton Ballad.*

"HERE'S the Laurel Sunday coming, and what we're to do, I can't think. Christians *must* make their *Pâques*, thou knowest."

So Antonn Comorre had said, with distressed perplexity a month ago, and now here was Good Friday, and he was none the wiser. Nay, worse, for, with the nearness of the sacred day, the need of a decision had become more pressing. Were they to take their Easter Communion from the hands of the interloper, or were they to abstain? Which of the two was the greater sin? These questions of casuistry were much perplexing the minds of the simple villagers, and as Holy Week drew to a close, you might have seen groups of them collecting together with puzzled faces and eager voices, which were hushed immediately if the constitutional priest chanced to pass by.

So matters stood, when, at nightfall on Friday, Ninorc'h went to fasten the oaken shutters and lock the door. Genofa had gone to bed, Christophe was slumbering on

a bench by the fire, and honest Antonn was sitting in his high-backed chair, with his forehead leaning on his hands, and his eyes fixed in gloomy abstraction on the flames.

"Wife," he said, slightly shifting his posture, as Ninorc'h, having made all secure, came and stood by the fire;—"wife, dost think the good God can have forsaken us because of the wrong they are doing to His Church? I've prayed for a sign to guide me, every day this week, and never a one has come. Ninorc'h, I've never missed my Pâques since the time I was confirmed, and I can't bear the thought of doing it now; but yet——"

He broke off suddenly, and raised his head.

"Hark! what was that? I thought I heard a step outside!"

They both listened eagerly, and the next moment there sounded a *tap! tap! tap!* on the oaken shutter.

"By Saint-Corneille! a late visitor. Give me my *pen-bas*, wife." So saying, the farmer opened the shutter and looked out.

It was not yet dark, and in the twilight he could make out the figure of a child, standing outside, with a wand in his hand.

He made signs to Antonn to open the window, then came close up to the sill and leaned upon it. The fire-light was now on his face, and Antonn was able to recognise him as little Kado, a child who had always sung in the choir when Dom Clemençz was priest at Carnac.

Putting his finger to his lips, the little lad drew down Antonn's face close to his, and whispered in his ear—

"To-morrow . . . . at midnight . . . . on Peulven Islet."

The farmer nodded. Though till now they had had no experience in Carnac, he had heard of such things elsewhere, and he understood at once that a secret service was to be held by a non-juring priest, for the faithful whose consciences would not allow them to accept the ministrations of the interloper, appointed without the sanction of the Church.

Having delivered his message, the child immediately glided away to repeat it elsewhere, and the farmer closed the window.

"What is it? What is it?" asked his wife, eagerly, as he returned to the fireside, and Christophe, who had roused up, asked the same question with his eyes. But Antonn stopped to cross himself before he made reply.

"It is," he said, very solemnly,—"It is the answer which we asked of the good God. We shall not go without our Pâques." Then he gave them the child's message.

Next day a completely new spirit seemed to have come over the village. Groups still gathered in the morning; but, instead of puzzled depression, the faces wore an expression of covert excitement. Towards afternoon, the village became very quiet; groups ceased to gather,

and there seemed a general desire to avoid observation. If anyone had opened the street-doors and gone into the houses, they might have seen men and women telling their beads, or kneeling before the Crucifix in silent meditation. But all this was not in preparation for High Mass in the old church of Saint-Corneille. For the first time since its foundation, the priest and his servers were destined to celebrate the Easter Mass to empty walls.

With the falling of the evening shadows, a little stir began again. Blue smoke curled plentifully from the chimneys, as the housewives made up the kitchen fires. Young girls stole out furtively, as though conscious of something to conceal, filled their pitchers at the well, and came back without the customary gossip. Men strolled down to the shore, trying to appear unconcerned, examined the boats, and made as though they were preparing to go a-fishing. Then all collected round their respective firesides, and a waiting-time began which appeared strangely long to the younger and more ardent. The moon would rise at eleven o'clock, and, a quarter of an hour before that, all were to meet at the strand for embarkation.

Apart from their religious feelings, there was a certain danger about the expedition, which gave it an added zest for many of the villagers. They had been chafing so long against the new laws, which outraged their most sacred feelings, (for, with a Breton, custom, especially in his religious observances, is second nature in a more stringent

sense than is, perhaps, the case with members of any other race) that it was a positive pleasure to feel that they were about to set them at defiance, however secretly. The law made it a matter of severe penalty for a non-juring priest to exercise his spiritual functions, and a misdemeanour for any citizen, either to harbour him or to attend his services.

It was necessary, then, to use every caution, and to preserve the utmost secrecy; but few Bretons were deterred by this, and the feeling that they might suffer for it, made each religious privilege dearer than ever. The townsmen might worship their tri-colour and bow down to their Tree of Liberty; but as for the peasants, *they* were "Christians," as they loved to call themselves, and would have none of such idols.

"Genofa," whispered Christophe, as, having covered the fire with turfs and locked the door behind them, Antonn Comorre and his wife went down the hollow lane, leaving the young people to follow. "Genofa, don't be afraid, *I* will take care of thee."

The young girl's hand did, indeed, tremble considerably as it rested on his arm; but it was rather with suppressed excitement, and what the French call "*exaltation*" of feeling, than with actual fear. Genofa's was just that impressionable, highly-strung nature which is most likely to be affected by such an occasion as the present, and under its influence all that was softest and most clinging

in her character came into prominence, giving her an added charm for natures formed to protect.

As Christophe spoke, her little hand rested more confidingly on his arm, and in the soft starlight he caught her timid glance of thanks; but she did not answer, for other groups were hurrying up in the same direction, all either utterly silent, or only exchanging monosyllables in hushed whispers. As they passed through the village, the groups swelled to a crowd, Yvonne Guenedon, carefully leading her old grandfather, being one of the first to join our party. She came close up to her cousin and pressed her hand, but did not speak; and thus, in dead silence, the population of the village proceeded to the shore, which is about a quarter of a mile distant. You could hear the *tramp, tramp*, of the hurrying feet, and catch a glimpse of a stream of white caps, and a dark line of broad beavers; but that was all, for not a light burnt in any cottage-window to betray the exodus of the inhabitants by lighting up their passage with a ray, brighter and more prying than what the stars could show. In one house only, a candle shone, and that was the dwelling of M. le Curé.

"Poor gentleman, he is writing his sermon for to-morrow," whispered more than one of his flock, sarcastically;—"pity he takes the trouble!"

Yet, though they spoke in scorn, hearts beat faster and eyes were turned nervously towards the lighted window,

as they passed the house, lest haply the *jureur** might be looking out, and pounce on the wandering flock, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, as they felt him to be.

And now a faint lustre began to suffuse the horizon, making the people quicken their steps; the sound of the sea, sighing over the pebbles on the strand, was distinctly heard; and in a very short time the band of peasants had reached the shore.

Here the women and old people stopped and seated themselves on the grassy sandhills, while the men pushed down the whole flotilla of fishing-boats, already conveniently placed for the purpose, towards the water's edge. You could hear the suppressed exclamations of the men, as they worked in concert, and all with a will; the grating of the keels on the pebbles, and the low plash of the waves. Otherwise all was so still that it was difficult to imagine that several hundred people were assembled there.

"Now, Genofa!"

The girl rose from her place by Yvonne's side as she heard herself called, and went down the shelving shore after Christophe, closely followed by Antonn Comorre, leading his wife.

"And Yvonne?" she whispered.

The lad turned sharply.

"Yvonne? What of her?"

* So the Bretons called the Constitutional priests.

"Will she not go with us? She cannot leave her grandfather, and she has no one to get her a boat."

Christophe looked confused. He had not thought of Yvonne, and this upset his arrangements. Besides, he did not want to take care of *two* girls, and the idea just then of Yvonne and her old grandfather was distasteful. He paused a moment.

"Well," he said presently, "I'll see if I can manage it, but I had only arranged for thee and——"

"Come along, lad," called out Antonn Comorre, who had gone on in front. "What art waiting for?"

Genofa explained.

"Perik Guenedon and Yvonne!" exclaimed the farmer. "Of course, of course; *I* can arrange for them. Here, Genofa, come with me, while Christophe goes back to fetch them."

Genofa joined her father at once, and Christophe had no choice but to go back.

And he *had* to take charge of two girls, after all, for Antonn Comorre accepted places for himself and his wife in a friend's boat, and packed the two girls and the old man into the boat which Christophe had engaged for the party from Coëtmor Farm. However, the charge was no heavy one; the sea was calm as a lake, and as Christophe and the boatman plied the oars, and the boat shot, to their regular plash, over the waters, the hush of the scene and the regular exercise soon lulled his tem-

porary vexation, and he began to take a quiet pleasure in watching the picture made by the two girls and the old man, as they sat facing him in the stern of the boat. Old Perik Guenedon sat with his hands leaning on the top of his staff, his white hair, worn long according to the ancient fashion of his race, blowing back from his calm old face, in the light breeze which just stirred across the waters. He seemed in nowise excited about the novel way in which he was going to the Easter service; only a quiet, calm collectedness lay upon his features, and the blue eyes were fixed on the sky before him, where the moon was just gliding up into sight, as though he were looking forward to a meeting, solemn as those beyond the tomb.

The face of Yvonne, who sat behind with Genofa, wore a similar expression, yet with a difference. In the youthful face, that look of calm expectancy had in it a loving, happy intensity, a tender grace, which was lacking to the elder countenance. The one you might liken to a pool of still water, in whose depths you can watch the flush and quiver of dawning day; the other, to the same pool sleeping in the sunset. Christophe did not think of this; but, as he looked at the girl's face, it recalled to him a picture he had seen in some church of our Lady of Expectation. Just such a look, he thought, was on the face of the Virgin after the message of the Angel had warned her of the coming of her Lord.

The two girls sat holding each other's hands, their white caps, both after the same pattern, looking snow-white in the silver of the rising moon, their gowns and bodices just alike, their silver crosses sparkling on their breasts. But the one cross rose and fell gently over a quiet heart; the other heaved with the throbbing of the bosom on which it lay.

No calm look was on the face of Genofa. Its dreaminess was stirred by intense excitement. Her nerves were evidently wound up to the highest pitch; her features quivered with feeling, like the sea under the trembling reflection of the moon, and a hundred shades of expression passed like shadows across the lovely brow. Yet with all the half-childish curiosity and timidity called forth by the unusual expedition, there was not a trace of thoughtless levity which could unfit her for the sacredness of the coming rite. Genofa, if intensely superstitious, impressionable, and excitable, was at the same time intensely devout. The two conditions often go together.

They had rowed for about an hour, with few words on any side, when the Breton fisherman to whom the boat belonged, glancing over his shoulder, said shortly—

"Ah, I thought so. There is Peulven Islet."

The others looked in the direction of his eyes, and there, sure enough, looking dark and mysterious in the blue moonlight, was a black object rising from the waters, surmounted by what appeared to be a dark crown,

standing out in stern relief against the sky. All around was a waste of waters, the low, reef-fringed coast-line showing dimly to the left, the offing, studded with the rocky islets of the Morbihan, stretching away into far blue vagueness on the right; this island stood alone, mysterious, solitary.

"I should take the helm here," said the boatman; "there are sunken rocks which need careful steering. Can any other of the company take an oar?"

"I can."

It was Yvonne who spoke, and she quietly changed places with the boatman and took his oar, which she used with the strong, skilful handling common to many of her countrywomen of the coast. The other boats, which, theirs being lighter than the majority, they had gradually outstripped, were now seen coming up, all directing their course towards the solitary islet, which seemed to grow out of the waters as they approached it. The dark coronet presently showed itself to be a circle of menhirs, grimly looking out over the heaving waves, from ages which seemed well-nigh everlasting, so far as human ken could stretch. If the menhirs of the land are awful in their stony immobility and the strange mystery of their origin (unknown, or but dimly guessed at), these of the sea, especially as seen at midnight and in circumstances like the present, were little short of terrible.

As the boats neared the rock, a cloud of sea-birds rose from its crevices and soared above the ring of menhirs, flapping their white wings and uttering their wild clangour, filling the silence with sudden turmoil.

"They are the Groac'hs,*" whispered old Perik Guenedon; "they are warning us off from their haunts. Holy Saint-Corneille! keep us from harm!"

"Amen," ejaculated the boatman, crossing himself, while Genofa's blue eyes grew round with alarm, and her fingers trembled, as she began rapidly to tell her beads.

Yvonne, in nowise stirred from her exalted calm, put her arm protectingly about the waist of her little cousin, while Christophe uttered a Breton exclamation, not complimentary to the boatman, who seemed, in spite of his delicate steering, inclined to enlarge upon the theme.

"Hush!" said old Perik Guenedon, solemnly, "do you not hear the *Confitemini Domino?* The priest is there already. Hark, to the chanting!"

Truly the dull old ears had been open first to catch the sounds they had been so long deprived of; and now that the gulls had flown to more distant haunts, the other occupants of the boat could distinctly hear a rich bass voice mingling a solemn Gregorian tone with the measured sound of the sea:—

"Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

* Name originally given to the Druid priestesses, who had their college in an island off the coast of Brittany; but now also applied to water-witches in general.

We have wished you good luck, ye that are of the house of the Lord!"

There was a solemn, deeply solemn gladness in the words, which found a ready answer in the hearts of the scores of peasants who had come thus into the wilderness, like the Israelites to Sinai, to meet with God. The greeting came home to every one of them; the landing was effected in utter silence, and then each man stood motionless, with bared head and beaver held between trembling hands, till the last words of that and of a portion of the 19th psalm which succeeded it, had died away over the heaving waters.

"I will keep Thy ceremonies: O forsake me not utterly!"

For a moment there was utter silence; then with one consent all present joined their voices in one thrilling *Amen!*

With many, at least, it was at once a vow and a commendatory prayer: a vow, kept afterwards to the death in the noble struggle made by the peasants of Brittany, Main, and La Vendée for the faith of their fathers: a prayer, which surely was not unanswered, even amid the blood and fire which for a time swallowed up the last hopes of faithful France.

CHAPTER VII.

A MIDNIGHT MASS.

"I will embark and I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin."
TENNYSON—"*The Holy Grail.*"

A NARROW, rocky cove, a sort of watery passage, leading nearly into the midst of the rocky islet, had received the boats one by one, and served as good moorings for them while their owners were absent. This creek was bordered by a shelving ledge, from three feet to as many inches in width, above which rose the rock sheer up to the summit of the island. In the face of the cliff, just where the creek ended, a flight of rude steps had been hewn—when or by whom none knew—leading up to the level space at the top, round which the ring of giant menhirs had been erected.

Up those steps the peasants passed in single file, emerging out of the deep shadow which lay in the creek, into the blue moonlight which flooded the summit, and lay side by side with the long black silhouettes of the Druid stones. There was room enough inside the circle for the whole assemblage, large as it was; and each peasant, as he passed in, saluted towards the centre,

and then stood or knelt in rank, the women in front, according to Breton custom in church, the men behind. Exactly in the midst of the ring, the central point around which this strange congregation grouped itself, was one of those large slabs of stone, like an altar-tomb, placed cross-wise on two upright supports, which are known under the name of dolmans.

Upon this had been placed a small crucifix, a pair of church candlesticks, and such other furnishings of the altar as it had been possible to transport there without too great risk of discovery. The wax tapers were lighted, and, partly shielded as they were by the encircling stones, burnt with a flame only slightly wavering, whose light looked strange and weird amid the surrounding moonshine.

Before this strange altar, facing the starlit east, stood a tall, thin figure in priestly vestments; perfectly upright, perfectly motionless, with a grave, intense face, appearing, as the mingling lights fell on it, of a pallor almost deathlike. He did not move as the people came in; he did not appear even to see that they were there till the last man had taken his position. Then his face changed, as that of one who comes back to earth from a state of ecstasy, and he extended his hands in blessing. The whole assemblage dropped on their knees, and for a moment there was silence. Then the priest turned to the altar, beckoned

to his server, who had just entered, and began the Mass.

As the opening words were read, clear and sweet across the waters, wafted thitherward by some wandering breeze, came the silver sound of a church clock. The priest paused a moment; it seemed to the kneeling people as though a voice more sacred still, which he dared not interrupt, were speaking to them through the night. Twelve strokes smote the listening air, and then all again was still. But the people knew that the Easter morn had begun, and the heads, which had been raised to listen were bowed again, lower than ever, before the Christ Who was risen indeed.

That sound had been the only one which was wanted to complete the ecstasy of religious fervour which this strange pilgrimage had kindled in nearly every heart. It seemed a link between the sacred shrines at home, from whence they were driven, and this service amid the wilderness of waters. On no Easter morn, perhaps, had the people of Carnac ever before made their Pâques with such solemnity as here, among the dark-storied menhirs of the sea.

Christophe and the rest of the party from the farm at Coëtmor, had taken up their position in that part of the circle which was behind the priest, so that they could not see his face. The voice, however, was known to Christophe, and thrilled him strangely. He waited eagerly till the moment should come when he could see for himself

whether voice and face corresponded A momentary glimpse only could he gain during the service; but that was enough to make his heart beat heavily, as he waited for the concluding words. He felt that a decisive moment in his life was approaching, and he trembled to meet it. He glanced at Genofa, as she knelt there in the moonlight, its radiance blanching still further her white cap, and flashing from her silver cross, her fair profile looking exquisitely pure and spiritual as it bent in prayer; and a strange pain shot through him like a dart. He could not face the decision which was at hand, should the priest prove himself to be the man he expected. A feeling came over him that he must turn and flee. Yet he waited.

The moment he was dreading came. The priest turned to give the final blessing to those behind him, and Christophe saw plainly the face of Bernèz. Their eyes met, and the lad knew immediately that the recognition was mutual. For a moment the strange, keen orbs of the young priest rested searchingly on Christophe's face; then he fell on his knees before the altar and covered his face, and the whole congregation followed his example. But the lad felt as though, in that brief moment, the thoughts of his heart had been read. A spell seemed to fall upon him Escape seemed no longer possible; and when the peasant-priest stood up to address his flock in a parting exhortation, conjuring them, as Christophe had heard him do before at Saint-Pol de Léon, to hold fast the faith once delivered, to

leave all for the sake of Him who rose as on that day—when he painted fidelity and treason, Heaven and Hell, life and death, in words which seemed to glow with fire and to burn their way into the most callous heart, something of the old passion, which had before passed from Bernèz to him, caught hold anew upon him. Yes, he would speak; he would not shrink from the ordeal, however fiery; the verdict of that man should decide his fate. So he still felt when, the address ended, the people stood up to disperse. But Genofa crept up to him, raised her sweet child's eyes to his, as if asking for sympathy, and slipped her arm through his. Then the lad trembled, and a new hesitation seized him. He might have gone away, after all, without speaking, but circumstances were too strong for him. Antonn Comorre pushed his way up to the pair.

"Come, Genofa," he said, "thy mother is already outside, and has a word to say to thee. Christophe here will follow with Perik Guenedon and Yvonne—see, they are still at their devotions—and we will all meet below at the boats."

He carried off his daughter, and Christophe stood waiting for the old man, who still knelt as though absorbed in prayer. He scarcely knew even then whether he were waiting for anyone else beside; but he watched the priest. Bernèz also knelt silently; but of the two he was the first to rise. Christophe made an involuntary movement forwards, then stopped irresolute. At the same moment the

priest turned, saw the lad, and immediately came towards him through the crowd of dispersing people.

"You wish to speak to me?" he said, in a low voice.

"I—— Yes."

Christophe had begun with hesitation. He knew too well what that speaking involved to decide on it easily but the keen eyes of the other were on him, and seemed to force him to answer in the affirmative.

"I knew it," replied the priest, in a tone which impressed his listener with the feeling that all that was happening had been fore-known by the man beside him.

There was a moment's pause.

The congregation was fast dispersing from the Druidical church, and old Perik Guenedon had risen to his feet; while Yvonne, who stood by his side, was looking round in search of her companions. She had not yet discovered Christophe, who stood in the dark shadow of one of the menhirs; but he saw her glance, and again paused in indecision.

Bernèz seemed to guess at what was passing in his mind.

"Shall it be now or later?" he asked, seeing that Christophe did not speak

"Not now," answered the lad, hurriedly. "They are all waiting for me."

"And you have more to say than can be said on the instant?"

"Yes."

"To-morrow evening, then, at moon-rise, by the great menhir on Carnac plain?—the one where you were found."

"You know me, then?"

"I know you, Christophe."

Again there was a slight pause. Yvonne had spied out our hero, and was making her way towards him. Bernèz saw her, and a change passed over his steadfast face—a look of human emotion, not often seen there. But it was suppressed immediately, and he seemed in haste to be gone before his sister should arrive.

"You will meet me, then?" he said, hastily.

"Yes."

"God be with you, then, my son!"

The young priest spoke the words solemnly, half raised his hand, as though to bless, and passed out beyond the circle of menhirs.

An instant after Yvonne came up.

"Oh! Christophe," she said, breathlessly, "thou art there!" I was so afraid everyone had gone and left us behind."

"My Father bade me wait for thee and Master Guenedon."

"Thy Father?"—she repeated the words half-doubtfully, then resumed, hurriedly—"Ah, yes, of course—Uncle Antonn."

Christophe had observed the hesitation, momentary as it was, and it hurt his sensitive pride.

"Of course," he said, quickly,—"you are right to remind me. But come, let us go; they will all be waiting for us."

He turned, and led the way with a rapid step to where old Perik Guenedon was standing, almost alone, within the Druid circle, leaning on his staff, with his calm face turned eastwards.

He looked round as Christophe and Yvonne came up, with a dreamy, happy smile, as though his thoughts were still occupied with heavenly rather than earthly things, and took the young man's offered arm without a word.

Thus, the old man and the young going on before, followed by the girl, they descended again the rocky staircase which led to the boats.

The two faces, placed thus side by side, would have been a fine study for a painter or a physiognomist. The old man's, beaten by many a tempest, scored by many a grief and struggle, worn to the bone by the full tale of the fourscore years allotted to the strong; yet full of peace, full of what is better than happiness, generally so called, with the light, not of earth, already resting upon the furrowed brow and strongly marked features, shaded by the broad beaver and the long gray locks which hung from under it upon the stooping shoulders.

The young man's, not yet come to full maturity, with a boy's smooth skin and rounded outlines, only shaded as yet by the dark down of ripening manhood; handsome with the dark, refined beauty of the black Celt, yet over-

shadowed by a cloud such as neither age nor trouble had brought upon the face of his companion; agitated by an inward struggle which had brought a painful contraction upon the broad fine brow, and caused the delicately-cut lips now to press themselves closely together, then to twitch and quiver as though beyond their owner's control.

So little did Christophe seem to be aware of where he was and whom he was with, that he quickened his steps without knowing it, and dragged the old man so roughly forward as to make him stumble perilously on the rude staircase, and to call forth a reproachful exclamation from Yvonne.

This recalled him to himself; he made a hasty apology, and, suiting his pace carefully to the feeble steps of old Perik Guenedon, reached the mooring-place without further mishap.

Antonn Comorre was standing up in his boat, looking impatiently towards the stairs, as Christophe and his two companions came up.

"Come along," he called out loudly—"come along! there's none so much time. The other boats have nearly all gone, and if we're left to make the landing alone, ten to one the *gardes nationaux* will have got scent of something unusual, and we may be caught as we touch the shore. The wind's rising, too, and it's likely enough we may have a squall. Here, Christophe, lad, help old Perik Guenedon and Yvonne in here beside thy mother and me, and do

thou take an oar in Victor Pouldu's boat; his good wife's taken a nervous fit, and won't be pacified unless our Genofa sits by her. Our friends couldn't wait any longer, so I was forced to take the boat you came in. Now, boatman, steady—push off first, and when we're clear of the rocks, the other boat'll follow. Steady!"

They pushed off, and Christophe, stepping into the last remaining boat, took his place between its owner and Genofa Comorre, who was doing her best to sooth the nervous tremors of poor half-blind Madame Pouldu, whom this unusual expedition had disturbed in a painful degree.

Victor Pouldu received him in silence; he, too, was evidently rather impatient at having been kept waiting, for there was a sombre look on his brow, and he scarcely allowed the Comorres' boat to get clear of them before, resting his oar against the rocks, he shoved his light bark down the watery passage which led to the open sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NEVER LET ME GO AGAIN!"

"Escape me!
Never—
Beloved!

* * * * *

It seems too much like a fate, indeed!"

R. BROWNING—"*Life in a Love.*"

THE wind was certainly freshening, and this they discovered with feelings of some anxiety, as they steered clear of the rocky islet and found themselves once more in the open. The sky, though still star-lit, was becoming veiled with a slight haze, and, worse still, a small dark cloud was hovering, like some dusky bat with outstretched wings, in the eye of the wind.

Victor Pouldu looked at it, as he hoisted the rich umber sail, where many a patch showed the ravages of tempest, and growled out rather unceremoniously:—

"Pity thou hadst not been content to return with no one but me, good wife. We might have been well on our way by this, and the boat would have been the lighter."

A shadow passed across Genofa's face as she overheard the words, and her pretty lips pouted. But Christophe glanced at her with a grimace, as much as to say—"We

won't mind him, thou and I; we know he doesn't mean it," giving emphasis to his look with a little nod, as he bent his broad chest forward to the swing of the oars; and the shadow passed away again. Victor's words had more effect on Madame Pouldu; she ceased her little sobbing complaints, as she spoke, drew the hood of the large cloak in which she was wrapped about her head, and, shrinking back in her seat, occupied herself with telling her beads, and repeating an apparently endless number of *Aves* and *Paters* in a loud whisper.

Meanwhile the surface of the sea, so smooth when they had come, began to curdle into long track-like lines of white, and the water chafed and foamed around the prow, as the boat cleft its swift way across the deep. The moonlight gradually thickened and lost colour as it strove with the ever-increasing haze; and a dimness fell on all around, which almost prevented our party from distinguishing the boats of their companions. A few sea-birds, roused by the coming storm, flew by on rapid wing; and a fine, thin shower of mingled rain and spray increased the discomfort of the two women.

Madame Pouldu showed her uneasiness by the increased rapidity of her prayers; and on Genofa's face, as she sat opposite to Christophe, with her small hands tightly clasped upon her lap, there grew a timid, appealing anxiety, a wide-eyed, childish alarm, which was not calculated to increase his attention, every moment becoming more

necessary, to the matter in hand. He could not bear to meet that look and yet feel himself totally unable to attend to, or give her comforting.

"Art frightened, little sister?" he ventured to say once, when the squall, which had been long threatening them, seemed in momentary likelihood of overtaking their flying boat.

"Yes," she said, with a quivering lip, a starting tear, and a sudden shiver, which brought down a gruff reproof from old Victor.

"Sit still, child," he said to the girl, whom he had known from her birth, and still looked on as almost a baby; "I let thee come to quiet my old woman's fears, and not to add thine own to the cargo."

Genofa hung her pretty head and pouted like a chidden child, and the hot blood rushed to Christophe's brow. He was about to make an angry retort, when the old man seized the sail with a sudden grasp. "Ship oars!" he cried, hastily. "Here, lend me a hand with the sail! Quick, lad! down with her; the squall will be on us in another moment!"

Aided by Christophe, he tore down the sail, resumed the helm with the steady hand of an experienced sailor, which must not tremble, whatever the heart may do, and prepared to meet the shock. The keen eye did not quail, the bronzed cheek showed not a trace of pallor; the only index to the inward anxiety was the quick sharpness of his

tone, a little knitting of the resolute brow, and the muttered prayer of the Breton sailor: "My God, have pity on us! Thy sea is so great, and our boat is so small."

Hardly were the words formed when the cloud, which had grown rapidly larger, reached the little vessel and drenched its occupants with blinding rain; the wind, with a shriek of rage, caught the frail bark and sent it scudding like a leaf across the waters, which foamed along the gunwale and threatened every instant to rush in and sink it to the depths.

Poor Madame Pouldu seized Genofa round the waist with a grip of frantic terror, and began repeating the prayer for passing souls, strangely mixed up with those for widely different occasions. The poor girl was no less frightened. A look of piteous entreaty came into her white face, and she stretched out her arms towards Christophe in mute appeal. The lad's heart beat strangely; but not with fear for himself. He leaned forward, took the little hands in both his own and held them fast. They fluttered in his grasp like frightened birds; and the touch of them, even in that awful moment, thrilled him through with a sensation of strange content. There was nothing he could do at that moment for the safety of the boat; and, as he sat there, holding the girl's small hands and looking into her beautiful, appealing face, he almost forgot the imminence of their common danger.

For some moments the boat flew on before the wind, like an arrow shot across the waters; then the squall suddenly blew itself out as quickly as it had arisen; or, more likely, the hurricane was of a transitory nature and passed on its way, with the cloud which bred it, leaving the little boat behind. Gradually the sky cleared again, and Victor Pouldu, with a long breath of relief, pointed shorewards and said—

"See, we are opposite Carnac village. Well, I scarcely expected to see the little place again. God grant the other boats have weathered the storm! Now, Christophe, lad, take the oars, while I turn her head inland. Steady, lad, the sea's running very high. Steady, I say, or we shall be swamped yet!"

He added the last words in hasty alarm; for, as the boat was put about, the heaving swell broke over the gunwale and poured in upon the occupants. For an instant, they were again in imminent danger; but again it passed, and relief grew upon the faces of the two women, as the boat drew ever nearer, and the moon, once more visible, showed them the faint outlines of the well-known objects on shore. Grey and cold looked the swelling waters; grey and ghost-like the long, low, sweep of coast, with its barren sand-hills, and the skeleton form of some long-wrecked vessel standing up dark among them against the colourless sky. But *there* was home—*there* was safety; and the knowledge of this

lent a warmth and beauty to the picture, in the eyes now fixed so longingly upon it.

The boat became more and more difficult to manage as they neared the land. She was already considerably water-logged, and laboured in the heavy swell which was running shoreward. Ponderous breakers, which seemed too weighty almost to curl, were washing far up the sands, with a muffled roll; and every boat which had already arrived was drawn up as high as possible among the grass-covered dunes.

"Well, God be thanked! here we are safe at last!" said old Victor Pouldu, preparing to leap into the surf, as he felt the boat's keel ground upon the sand.

But scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when a breaker, more gigantic than its fellows, rose suddenly like a wall behind them—a terrible gray wall, with a ghastly white coping—swung over with a dull thud as of muffled thunder, and buried the boat and her occupants in its watery ruins!

How it all happened Christophe never clearly knew. He was conscious of nothing but the sudden rising of that awful wall, of a white horror of despair on one beautiful face—the stretching out of arms towards him, and a shrill cry of anguish—

"Christophe, save me!"

After that came a sensation as though all the sea had gone over him; a blind, choking struggle, a desperate

grasping after something—somewhere; a wild desire to save a life which was not his own; something touched—clutched; a death grapple. There sensation ended, and there was a blank. Consciousness came back with a feeling of horrible pain, mental and physical, and the lad found himself lying just out of reach of the waves, with old Victor Pouldu standing over him. His hands were still clenched, but they only held some bits of seaweed. He raised himself with a choking cry.

"Genofa! My God! have I *not* saved her, after all!"

Old Victor Pouldu looked at the lad, and shook his grey head.

"Ay, ay," he said, slowly—"her body at least."

"Take me to her."

The old man gave him his hand, and he rose with difficulty.

"Where?"

Victor pointed towards the sandhills.

"There," he said, laconically; and the lad stumbled forward, as though he were walking in a dream.

Under the lea of one of the hills lay the girl; her head, from which the white cap had fallen, on the lap of a fisherman's wife, her long yellow hair straying, like wet gold silk, over her shoulders. A man in a fisherman's dress was bending over her and chafing her hands; and beside her, crouched among the scanty growth of sea-grass, was old Mère Pouldu, wet to the skin, and shaking with cold!

As Christophe approached, a long shiver passed over the, till then, motionless body of the girl. The eyelids quivered, opened, and life came back with a long sigh. For a moment she lay quiet; then, catching sight of the lad, her face lighted, and she stretched out her arms towards him, like a child to its mother. He knelt down, and she clung to him with a shudder.

"Christophe!" she gasped—"Christophe! never let me go again—never, never, never!" Then the arms relaxed, and once more the golden head sank unconscious; but this time it found a resting-place on Christophe's shoulder.

CHAPTER IX.

HARD BESET.

"'Whatever gird thee round about,
Of seeming good or seeming ill,
Do thou thy duty; what befals
It is for God—not thee—to will.'

"The blue lips cease; but, musing on,
He wrestles with the growing thought,
Until the aching temples throb—
There where a net the veins have wrought."

—W. SAWYER.

"NEVER *let me go again—never, never!*"

The words kept repeating themselves over and over in Christophe's ears all that night. Even after all danger was past, and the whole party were safely at home again in their beds, the lad lay awake, tossing in feverish excitement, rehearsing the scene which had passed, and listening to the piteous little cry, which still seemed to sound through the night. Now it would fill him with a wild delight: it was his name—*his*, she had called on, *him* she had turned to first! "Never to let her go again!"—what did that mean? His heart beat passionately at the thought, and he clasped his arms across his breast, as if her golden head still lay there.

Then a cold agony of despair would take the place of

transport, as he remembered the promised interview with Bernèz and the doom which it might involve.

"Never, never, never!"

The last part of her cry then rang in his ears like the dreary sobbing of the wind among church-yard grass. How different the meaning now! If for a few moments he sank into restless slumber, thronging dream-figures flocked by him. His father's face, hideous as a nightmare, grinned at him from behind another at which he *dared* not look. The stern, pale countenance of Bernèz was always intruded, if for a moment he rested in the vision of Genofa's sweet, blue eyes and golden hair; and behind all was ever a background of Druid stones—stones which seemed to lie on his heart with the weight of a terrible spell.

He awoke for the last time from one of these visions with the feeling that the great menhir of Saint-Samson was topping over upon him; awoke with a start, to find the flush of sunrise already crimsoning the east, and to hear the church-bells ringing for a Mass which no one would attend.

With a sense of relief, the lad rose from his bed, flung open the little window in the roof, and leaned out.

How deliciously fresh was the morning air, sweet with a thousand odours from the distillery of the dew. How calm the quiet of field and orchard, where grass and trees were dressing themselves in tenderest green, and

the early birds were shaking down the dew-drops, as they preened themselves before tuning up for their own Easter service of purest praise. The blackbird down there in the old mossy apple-tree had already begun to try his flute-notes, pausing every now and then, with dainty head on one side, to listen to the echo against the old gable-wall.

How sweet, how restful it all was after the horrors of the last few hours!

Christophe felt as though he were looking out into a paradise of purity from the borders of some wood of vile enchantments, such as he had often heard of in the stories told round the fire-side on winter evenings. As the breeze blew on his hot forehead and lifted the damp, dark masses of hair, he shuddered at the images which had risen in his mind, like poisonous vapours from some stagnant pool, and a horror took possession of him at this revelation of unknown depravity. And after making his Pâques too! Had it then been human love and not divine which had warmed his heart and made him feel as though again he might join his fellow Christians in their act of highest worship?

Poor lad! he was too much shaken to be fit just then to sit in judgment on himself; but, though he knew it not, that midnight act had given him a secret strength to keep at bay the powers of darkness which were striving within him. He covered his face with his hands, and

whispered a prayer. He knew he must come to some definite decision before again mingling with the family of his foster-father. He must look this tumult in the face and see what it meant, before he met Genofa once more.

He had been wont to call her his little sister; he had scarcely doubted till now that his love for her was a brother's; but last night's events had rudely shaken this comfortable belief. He was *not* her brother—never could be—knowing what his father was, the thought of such relationship seemed, now he came to analyze it, little short of pollution. He was not her brother—could he be something nearer?

This thought, following consecutively on the preceding one, brought before him a clearer perception of the situation than he had yet had. If it brought a shudder merely to think of Matelinn Gourven and Genofa together, what would it be to link her lovely purity with such hideous defilement; to bring upon her the heritage of crime which was the bane of his own life? Nay, was he not, involuntary as his part had been, a sharer in it? Could he then put forth his blood-stained hand and touch the flower-fairness of this innocent child? "Never!"

The lad's lips closed tightly, as he uttered the word, and a look of decision came upon his agitated face. Sinful he might be; but of *this* sin he would not be guilty; suffer as he might, he would not bring suffering

on her. He loved her—he knew it now—and the knowledge came to him with a bitterer pang than he had felt yet in his short, sad life, where the pain had far outweighed the pleasure. He loved her; loved her as those love who are to live a double life, which death even sometimes refuses to sever; but she could never be his—never, never, never!

"Oh, God! how hard it is to love, and love in vain!" The words, which he had heard, perhaps, in some old Breton *sône*, at the mouth of a wandering minstrel, came back to him now like a voice given to his misery, and the lad laid his aching forehead on the window-sill and sobbed in utter wretchedness.

So young, and yet so sorrow-stricken! Alas! from sorrow there is no age exempt. Presently, however, he grew quieter, as another thought rose like a spectre to be faced. Was *she* still unconscious? Had he, ignorant as he had been till then of his true feelings towards her, never gone further than a brother might, so as to touch her heart without knowing it? The recollection of her behaviour last night in the hour of danger—that behaviour which had been the cause of the transport of delight which had passed over him during the hours which lay between—now brought with it a cold feeling of misgiving.

But, no; had he not heard that people are apt to colour facts according to their wishes? The thought that his love might be returned had seemed so sweet at the moment

when he was first aware of it; was not this, perhaps, the cause that he had fancied a meaning in her words and actions, which, after all, was probably not warranted by them? Painful as it might be, he would retrace in thought the events of the night and see what he would now make of them.

A furrow came on the lad's young brow as he thought and thought; but he was very honest with himself, and did not seek to escape from any part of the painful task. Yet, when it was done, though his first belief was greatly shaken, a doubt still remained—a doubt which, perhaps, might never solve itself for him. *His* part seemed plain, however, so far, at least, as the present was concerned; his resolve was taken. He would keep his appointment with Bernèz, open his heart to him in confession, and abide by his judgment, whatever it might be. Were it as he expected, then farewell to life, as those lead it who are free to live in families. Were it otherwise?——

For a moment the lad paused in the hard task he had set himself to think out, and a light came into his eyes, as at the glimpse of a happiness all but impossible in its brightness. Were it otherwise; should it turn out that Genofa's heart were already touched, then, perhaps, the prize might *yet* be his. The lad's logic was none of the best; for, at this thought, he almost lost sight of the premises from which he had started, and his dizzy brain sprang forward towards a conclusion which ought to have

been impossible. But, then, if she *really* loved him? Yet, no; he would not think of that. There was danger to his resolution in the very idea; and a hard road must be trodden first before even the bare "if" were reached on which the whole fabric of this sweet improbability rested.

"God help me!"

It was more of a despairing exclamation than a prayer; yet, as the lad, weary with thinking, turned from the window and flung himself once more upon his bed, the answer came in the form of a deep and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER X

WHAT CARE I?

"Such wayward ways hath Love, that most part in discord
Our wills do stand, whereby our hearts but seldom do accord."
—*Earl of Surrey.*

AND Genofa?

No dreams had troubled *her*, during that night so memorable to Christophe.

Fatigue and exhaustion had been succeeded by the calmest repose, and when the girl awoke, somewhat later than usual, she had some ado to realize that the events of the night before were not rather the fantastic changes of a dream, than the real facts of a sober reality.

Her life had till now been so quiet, so undisturbed by unusual occurrences, that it certainly *did* seem very strange that between her usual bed-time and hour of rising she should have gone through so much.

Had she *really* made her Pâques already in the Druid temple at Peulven Islet? If so, how was it, then, that the bells of Saint-Corneille, the old church where she had been baptized, were still ringing for one of the many Masses wont to be celebrated there on Easter morning?

Had she *really* been whirled away over the wild night

sea with Christophe, and been swallowed up by the deep? If so, how was it that she was lying so comfortably in her own bed under the protection of the sacred Monogram, and not among the shells and tangle at the bottom of the Sea of Morbihan. Had she really——

But here the girl stopped her idle speculating, and the hot blood of consciousness rushed over all the fair whiteness of her innocent brow; for she had come to something which she *felt* was a reality—felt with a quickening of every pulse, whose testimony could not be gainsaid. She remembered how, in the hour of danger, she had called on Christophe; how she had clung to him in her agony; how, amid it all, had come a feeling of deep content, as he held her close with her head lying upon his breast. She had thought that she was dying then, and, somehow, she had not cared!

Yes, it was all true; but, with the knowledge, her maidenhood awoke, and the childlike unconsciousness which had possessed her till then was rudely shaken.

She could not face the fancies which came thronging up to her, but sprang out of bed and joined her mother, who was already busied about her household work.

Ninorc'h took the flower-face of her little daughter between her two hands, after she had kissed it, and looked closely into the forget-me-not depths of the lovely eyes. She was anxious to see that the dangers of last night had been passed through without scath. The long lashes

drooped a little, but the beautiful bloom on the soft cheeks was, if anything, deeper than usual, and Ninorc'h let her child go with another kiss, satisfied that her health was quite unimpaired. Of anything else she did not dream.

She was still more satisfied when she heard the girl's clear voice softly singing an Easter carol, as she foddered the cows with the sweet, fresh grass she cut for them under the old apple-tree. She did not think how an upward look at the little gable-window above had made the girl's heart beat, and set it wondering how the face would look which she had last seen with the strong emotions of last night's danger still upon it. How would he meet her? Would it be *quite* as usual? And then the bloom had deepened on her cheek, and she had broken into song, half as a distraction amid those strange, unformed thoughts, half from a feeling of happiness she could hardly account for. She was still cutting grass for her favourite black cow, when the door opened and Christophe appeared.

She started so that she all but reaped her fingers instead of the daisied grass; yet she went on with her task, feigning not to see him.

"Good morning, little foster-sister, a joyful Easter to thee," said a grave voice; and then she looked round and returned his greeting in kind. He did not stay to help her, but walked on towards the stable and went in; and Genofa went on cutting the grass mechanically, feeling as though she had had a fall—a fall from some airy cloud-

castle of impossibilities on to the hard ground of matter-of-fact. When they met at breakfast it was just the same. Christophe was, if anything, graver and more silent than usual, and did not even allude to what had happened last night. Nor did the father and mother either, for that matter, after the first morning meeting with their little daughter, when Ninorc'h had kissed her with whispered words of thanksgiving, and Antonn had blessed her in a voice which trembled in spite of him. But she could understand *their* silence; they felt too deeply for words just yet; whereas he — was it that the matter touched him very little?

In her newly awakened sensitiveness, the girl almost thought so; and when he spoke to her next—some trivial remark which he forced himself to make—she answered quite pettishly; and soon after, having finished her breakfast, she rose from the table and went out.

She was going for water, but she did not tell Christophe, as she usually did, so that if he liked he might come and help her. Her heart felt sore within her, and the thought that the half-acknowledged happiness of the early morning had been all a delusion, brought with it not only disappointment,—felt, though unacknowledged,—but also a horrible feeling of shame which swallowed up every other sensation. In her agony she had shown her heart; had shown him its preference before she even knew it herself, and he had looked on with indifference! Nay, worse; he must have

thought her unmaidenly, and was checking her thus by coldness and unconcern.

It was horrible, unbearable! But she would show him at least that she did not care; she would make him believe that he had been mistaken, after all.

And she did. No young beauty was ever more coy and distant than was Genofa that day towards him who had saved her life at the risk of his own; and when young Count Aymon de Kerdec'h appeared unexpectedly at the village festivities in the afternoon, she received his notice with the greatest apparent satisfaction, and danced so often with him that the other village girls were mad with jealousy.

"Little coquette," Christophe heard them whisper, as the rustic beauty stood apart with the gentleman, smiling and blushing, laughing and chatting; now lifting her bright blue eyes to his; now lowering them and letting her dimples play bewitchingly, as she listened to some low-toned remark. "Little coquette, she'll have her head turned with a vengeance this time; and yet she might know what aristocrats mean when they flirt with a girl of the people. Well, well; she'll not listen to anybody after this."

Christophe moved away. The words and the sight alike stung him, and he was glad to leave the holiday-makers behind and return to the quiet of the farm, deserted at this hour by all its inhabitants.

"She won't listen to anybody after this."

Why was there such a sting in the words? Why should he care? Had he not just been hoping that, if suffering there must be, he might bear it alone? That, at least, *her* heart might be still untouched. That it was so, he fancied he now had ample proof; and yet it did not make him happier. One thing it did, however: it made the path he had traced for himself the easier to tread. He could go forward among its stones and thorns without the remorse of involving another in its pains and penalties. He might give himself up unhesitatingly to whatever Providence, as represented by the priest Bernèz, might decide as his future fate.

That struggle at least, as the poor lad said to himself, was now over. The *ignis fatuus* of a deluding hope—a sweet, impossible possibility—which might have led him astray in spite of his resolution, had gone out for ever Well, better so.

CHAPTER XI.

A DRUIDICAL CONFESSIONAL.

"Pardon in me
The oscillation of a mind
Unstedfast, and that cannot find
Its centre of rest and harmony
For evermore before mine eyes
This ghastly phantom flits and flies,
With frantic gestures and wild cries.
It hurries onward, and aloud
Repeats its awful prophecies!
Weakness is wretchedness! To be strong
Is to be happy! I am weak,
And cannot find the good I seek,
Because I feel and fear the wrong!"

LONGFELLOW—"*The Golden Legend.*"

TWILIGHT was falling as Christophe entered the Druid lines.

A shudder, which he struggled against, but could not repress, shook him from head to foot on finding himself in the silent presence of the tall grey stones; and this was repeated still more strongly when he came to a stand at the foot of the monster, which still went by the name of his father.

A Child of the Menhir!

Was there, then, really some mysterious connection between his fate and these relics of a bygone age? Was the

sorcery, which tradition associated with these weird monuments, still alive for him?

A sensation, which almost amounted to fear, came over the lad, as he waited there in the gathering gloom, and recalled, one after another, the circumstances of his life.

Under a menhir his mother had died; under a menhir he had himself been found; among menhirs he had played in childhood; by a menhir had happened that which had hung, as it were, a cloud of blood between him and the joys of youth. And now? Yes, it was by a menhir again that his life's lot was to be decided!

Truly, as in his dream, these awful stones formed the background to every scene of importance in his history; his life-thread seemed inextricably entangled among them. No wonder that the superstitious Breton lad should turn cold, as under the dread hand of fate; no wonder he felt an unreasoning terror, as he waited, in the growing darkness, for the next scene in the drama of which he himself was the central figure.

"God's blessing be upon thee, my son."

The voice sounded quite close to him, and yet he had heard no step. He looked round with a start, and there, gliding from behind the menhir, was the tall, thin form in the black soutane, which he was expecting, yet dreading, to see. Bernèz did not offer his hand. Well as the lads had known each other in early life, there seemed to have arisen an imperceptible barrier between them. The one was a

priest and confessor; the other a layman and a penitent. That was the difference; but each felt that it was a difference which was everything.

"You sent for me, my son?"

Bernèz said the words rather as a remark than as a question, while he stood waiting, with his back slightly leaning against the menhir, and his keen eyes fixed upon Christophe.

And the lad seemed to need a reminder, for he stood quite silently opposite the priest, apparently forgetful for what purpose they were there.

He looked up at the words; but his gaze was strangely absent, and still he did not speak.

"You have something to confess?"

Again it was the statement of a fact rather than a question, and the searching eyes seemed to be closely watching for its effect on the hearer. Nor did they look in vain. A perceptible shiver passed over Christophe, and he changed his position uneasily; but still he said no word. Only he looked at the young priest in his turn, with a sort of fascination in his gaze.

The priest tried again, and the expression of his eyes became more searching than ever; he seemed trying to read the thoughts which were still withholden from him.

"My son," he said, in a deep, quiet tone,—"my son, do not fear to speak. The crime is great, the shame is terrible; but there is no crime so great, no shame so

terrible which a true confession, a sincere repentance, cannot relieve. Even blood— —"

He stopped, for a spasm had passed over his hearer's face at the word, and the blood had left his very lips.

He made an effort to speak—failed once; and when the words did come, the voice had a strange dry tone, totally unlike its usual quality.

"You know about it?"

The priest hesitated. The response was apparently not what he had expected. Then, after a moment's pause, he went on, ignoring the question. "My son, do not try to hide anything from me. Speak freely, and I will advise you."

"But if you know it already, why should I speak? God knows it is a hard thing to tell, even under the seal of confession."

There was a sort of bitter defiance in the tone, which struck the young priest unpleasantly. A shade of colour mounted to his pale face; but he bit his lips, as though to curb some hasty words which were rising to them; and when he spoke, the voice was all that it should be.

"My son, why should you waste precious time in what is not to the purpose? You are here to confess a great and secret sin. Kneel and confess it as unto God, through me, His unworthy minister. Only by means of confession can you be freed from a terrible burden. If you are too proud to humble yourself, be sure God will humble you,

and you will bear the brand with you even to your grave —ay, and beyond it, as did proud and unrepentant Cain. Down on your knees, in the very dust! and were it, indeed, a brother's blood which cries——"

Again he was suddenly interrupted, for, as though struck to the heart by a random arrow, the lad did indeed sink to the ground with a cry—

"Then it is known! Oh! Bernèz, save me!—hide me Indeed, indeed, I am not fit to die!"

In an agony of terror, he clasped the young priest's knees and groaned. He seemed to have lost all self-control under the terrible fear which had suddenly fallen upon him; a fear which had possessed him before now, but from which he had fondly hoped he was now secure. The secret was terrible enough to bear about with him, while it still remained a secret; but if it were indeed known?

A cold dew bathed the poor lad's brow at the very thought, and his breath came in painful gasps. For must he not suffer for it? Could he accuse a father to free himself, even a father such as his? And were he to do so, where was the proof?

Bernèz was greatly astonished at the strange effect of words which, even with the previous clue which Christophe had unconsciously afforded him, he had hardly expected would be so appropriated. He valued himself on being a judge of character, and his former knowledge of Christophe

had certainly not led him to expect that he would find in him a criminal of so deep a dye as the lad's words seemed to show.

What had he, then, done? Could it be that one so young was already a murderer? And if so? The young priest thought of the solemn service of the early morning at which this lad had been present, — admitted, like the rest, under stress of circumstances, without the ordinary previous precautions,—and he shuddered.

No, it *could* not be. There must be some mistake.

"Christophe," he said, gravely, carefully guarding his voice from the emotions which he could not but feel— "Christophe, my son, be calm. You are under some mistake. Listen to me. I do not know any particulars of this crime of which you accuse yourself; so far as I know, they are still between you and God. Take a few moments to quiet yourself; reflect, and then make your confession. You have nothing to fear from me. All that you tell me will, as you know, be as safe with me as with the grave. Is it not under the seal of confession?"

These words seemed to re-assure the lad. He stopped his convulsive gasping to listen, looked up for one moment, when Bernèz ceased speaking, with a sigh of relief, and gradually grew calmer, though the glitter of excitement still shone in his dark eyes.

Bernèz stood patiently waiting, with his eyes fixed on the evening sky, where the stars were coming out, though the

moon, already past her full, had not yet risen. A light—that calm, grave radiance which sometimes lingers so long after sunset—still shone in the west, and its reflection rested on the pale, spiritual face of the young priest, and on the tonsured head, from which he had removed his broad beaver. Calmness and strength, thoughts and desires raised above earth and her troubles, were in his whole aspect, setting it in strong contrast with the passionate emotion of the figure—younger, indeed, but not by many years—which crouched at his feet; and around stood, rank on rank, the strange, silent, motionless menhirs. Something in the look and attitude of the young priest was curiously in harmony with them—with them, and with the stars. He seemed a link between. Kneeling there at his feet, Christophe had a sort of perception of this, though he could not have expressed how it was that they were connected in his mind. Presently the young priest put his hand gently but firmly on the shoulder of the kneeling lad. "Now," he said, briefly.

Then, the usual form having been gone through, the confession was begun, and the secret, so long hidden in the depths of the young burdened heart, was at length shared with another.

The lad seemed to have extreme difficulty in speaking. His voice was low and husky. Every now and then he seemed ready to choke, and, as the scenes in the terrible tragedy rose one by one before him, a convulsive shudder

would pass over his whole frame and almost take from him the power of continued expression. From time to time also, if a wandering breeze stirred the herbage, he would start and look round with a frightened gaze, as if he dreaded to see something, or feared an unseen auditor. He was very candid, however; he left nothing to be supposed, but poured out the whole story, not only of the deed itself, but of the effect it had had upon him. How for a time it had overwhelmed his religion, and given him a shuddering horror even at the sight of a Crucifix. How he had lived for a time without God in the world, and how it had been through Bernèz himself that he had been re-awakened to spiritual things and made to think of an atonement.

His whole inner consciousness was laid bare up to the close of last night's Mass. Only of the discovery he had since made he did not speak. This was the sole reservation; and, sin or not, he felt he *could* not speak of it. He was ready, or thought he was, to make the sacrifice; but to pluck this secret also from his heart he felt he had not the power. Therefore, when he had come in his confession to the interview last night—an interview at which this confession would have been made, had there been time—he paused, unable to go further. And the priest did not press him; he had no cause to expect that there was more to tell.

When Christophe had finished, he drew a deep breath,

and knelt on, waiting for the pronunciation of his fate. It was long in coming.

Bernèz stood silent, with eyes bent on the ground, pondering deeply over the strange confession which had been made to him; pondering, too, in what way he should act upon it. For some time before he had been claimed by the pillawer, Bernèz had had his eye on his uncle's adopted son. He had recognised powers beyond those of an ordinary peasant lad in this foundling; and, devoted as he was, with an intense and almost fanatic enthusiasm to the interests of the Church and the cause of religion, he had often considered in what way an instrument, more highly tempered than the spades and ploughshares among which it lay, might be best used in their service. The absence of all family ties had seemed to him a further qualification, and almost a divine proof that the foundling was set apart for some special use His own strong vocation had been an index which, unconsciously perhaps, pointed in the direction which that service was to take; and those words of Christophe's on the day of his First Communion had made his heart leap with a feeling of prophetic insight. He had spoken—spoken from out of his own deep enthusiasm—and the lad's response had fallen upon him, like cold water over glowing iron. He had left him in despair, and with a feeling of indignation; and from that moment he had thought of Christophe—when he thought of him at all—as a renegade, fighting against

the Divine will. His appropriation by Matelinn Gourven, and condemnation to one of the most degraded of callings, he had looked upon with a sort of grim satisfaction, as a fit judgment on one who, having turned his back on the high privileges of a son, was doomed to wander into a far country and herd with swine.

And now the wheel had come full circle; the lad was finding out for himself, finding out by bitter experience what he, Bernèz, had found out for him long before.

There was a sort of triumph in the young priest's heart, as he stood there with this lad at his feet—a triumph which he took for angelic joy over a repentant sinner; but which, had he carefully analysed it, he would have found to be mingled at least with a feeling less pure.

But what human being, however raised above the things of this world, is ever totally free from earthly taint?

Yet he paused before answering. There were difficulties in the way. True, the instrument now offered itself for the grinding which should fit it for use; but there was blood on it: blood, shed indeed by another, but leaving a taint nevertheless. Whence, too, was the iron taken? From a quarry full of impurity. Would these two drawbacks outweigh its evident value in the judgment of those in authority? Would they cause its rejection?

Bernèz doubted; yet he was inclined to think not. The Church was passing through a time of extreme danger; she was in pressing need of efficient servants, and

might overlook blemishes under present circumstances, which in happier times she would refuse to tolerate.

So much for that difficulty; but there was another.

The very circumstances which were in Christophe's favour on the one hand, were against him from another point of view.

The Constitution had degraded the Church to the rank of a mere handmaid to the State. It had broken up the orthodox seminaries, or filled them with constitutional teachers. How, then, was Christophe to get the training necessary for admission into the priesthood? He could not have it at present, in France at least; he must wait; and might not waiting be dangerous to his purpose?

Certainly it might; yet, on the other hand, it was well, perhaps, that the lad's sincerity should be tried. He must not think that the favour was on his side, and too great readiness to admit him might suggest this. That the Church should open her arms to receive an erring and repentant son; that she should confide to him the stewardship of her most sacred mysteries, and consent to enrol him among her ministers, must be looked on as an inestimable privilege.

So reasoned Bernèz; and, having arrived at this conclusion, he still delayed for a while to break the silence. Folding his arms on his breast, he raised his eyes to the evening sky, as though he would read there the will of Heaven. But the long delay was agony to the penitent.

The silence, at last, became unbearable, and he committed the indiscretion of breaking it himself.

"Am I not to have absolution?" he asked, in a trembling voice. "Am I too guilty even for Heaven to pardon? I used to think so; for long after the—the deed (he faltered over the word) I looked on myself as a murderer; but of late, things have seemed clearer. I have hoped——"

He stopped; but his pleading face, now lifted to that of the young priest, as if to read there his fate, spoke the rest.

Again Bernèz was at a loss what to answer. He had been so completely taken up with that side of the case which concerned Christophe's acceptance as a priest, that he had almost forgotten to regard him as a penitent; and to find himself called on to settle the question of his share in the guilt of this terrible deed was embarrassing. Yet—the perception dawned upon him as the lad spoke—the two questions were closely involved, the one with the other; and—what voice whispered this in his ear?—might it not be prejudicial to lessen the lad's sense of guilt? However, he must answer without further deliberation; the agonized pleading of those eyes demanded it; otherwise the lad might be driven to desperation, and the instrument lost for want of one to care for it.

The consequence was that, without absolutely doing it consciously, certainly not *deliberately*, Bernèz temporized.

"It is an unfortunate affair," he said—"a very sad and

terrible crime; and let me remind you, my son, that, had you followed my advice, you need never have been involved in it. You remember how I counselled the step you are now desirous of taking? *Then* it would have been comparatively easy; *now* it is difficult. No, do not speak," he went on, seeing, from the sudden change of the lad's countenance, that he was going to interrupt him. "I do not say that it is impossible; it is, probably, so far as I can now see, the one way out of the fatal labyrinth in which you have entangled yourself. Be calm, my son, be calm; I am not about to refuse you absolution, though your errors have been great. Apart from anything else, have you not confessed to me that for a long space of time you have lived the life of an outcast from religion? No, I will not refuse you absolution; but it must be given conditionally. Your impulse to make atonement, not only for yourself, but for the far greater guilt of your father, seems to me a heavenly leading. In my judgment, you have brought upon yourself this sin and sorrow by fighting against the will of God, Who, as I believe, designed you for His special service. Like Jonah, you have fled from Him, and, like Jonah, He is bringing you to obedience by the rod of His power Thank God for His mercy, my son, that He deigns to do it; and every thorn in the cross laid upon you, painful as it now is, will become for you as a flower of love."

Bernèz's face kindled as he spoke; his voice took the thrilling tone usual to it under the enthusiasm of preaching,

and the spell which he had before exercised on Christophe again came into operation.

His face, too, kindled; the depression which had fallen upon him was suddenly lifted, and he felt inspired to bear any burden which this man might see fit to allot.

"Only tell me, father, what I must do, and I will do my best to work it out, cost what it will."

These last words were added in a lower tone, for a momentary vision of Genofa flitted before the speaker's mind.

Then Bernèz explained so much of his views as he saw fit to impart to the young aspirant to the priesthood. Christophe listened in silence, and when he had finished said, with a half-sigh:—

"Then you think I am really fit?"

Bernèz put up his hand, as though to check too great presumption."

"I said not so, my son. You were nearer once than now; and it is a hard thing to regain one's first estate. But do not despair. Heaven gives you a time of probation; set this great honour always before you, and beware lest, having put your hand to the plough, you again look back to the world and its fleeting joys. You have offered yourself to God, if He will have you; you are as if devoted till He sees fit further to reveal His will by allowing you admission into an orthodox college. If you waver, think what lies behind ready to swallow you—the black abyss

from which you have yet but hardly escaped. If you persevere, and Heaven see fit to accept your atonement—ah! what joys, never-ending, outweighing all that the world can offer, as this menhir (he placed his hand on the giant stone) would outweigh the pebbles at its feet!"

Bernèz paused, and a look of ecstasy lit up his pale, thin face. He seemed lost in the contemplation of some supernal vision. Suddenly he started.

"I was forgetting," he said. "There is search out for me, and I may not linger too long. I must be in shelter before the moon rises. Kneel, my son, and thou shalt have absolution—only remember, it is *conditional*."

He pronounced the formula; then, with his hand on the lad's head, he solemnly blessed him, and glided away as noiselessly as he had come.

For full five minutes, Christophe stood looking vacantly into the gloom, in the direction which the priest had taken; then, as he had done before on his return to Carnac, he knelt down by the menhir, pressed his lips to the cold stone, and signed himself with the cross. Again it was a sort of dedication; but this time the sacrifice seemed infinitely nearer, and escape less and less likely.

Kneeling there close under its shadow, the great dark pillar seemed to tower to an awful height above his head. A giddiness seized him; the menhir seemed to totter as though about to crush him. He rose hastily and staggered away. It was as if inexorable fate were falling upon him—

fate, heavy as the menhir, dark as the evening shadows which were falling thickly around.

And yet, since Genofa did not love him, was it not happiest so? Had not Bernèz thrilled him through with a description of happiness, not of this earth, in store for him? Why, then, should he feel so stunned, so oppressed by the prospect?

The lad could not answer his own questions; reason seemed paralysed; he could only feel.

CHAPTER XII.

PLAYING AT LOVE.

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls."
—R. BROWNING.

FOR three days after this Genofa and Christophe avoided each other, and scarcely spoke. She from shamefacedness, wounded pride, and self-respect, and a disappointment she scarcely liked to confess, even to herself; he, partly from wounded feeling, but still more from the dedication he was conscious of having made.

There was a pain at the heart of both; a longing after each other, which neither would yield to; a sense as though the sun had gone under a cloud.

Christophe saw it plainly, and knew the wherefore of his pain; poor little Genofa felt it dimly and confusedly, refused to look her trouble in the face, and strove to forget it in the company of young Count Aymon, who was still at the Château and seldom let a day slip by without coming to the home of his foster-parents. To see them together was more almost than Christophe could bear. He knew she was not for him; but to see her with another—that other a handsome, well-born youth, jesting gayly and

whispering soft nothings, to which she listened with a smile and a blush—was gall and wormwood to him. His heart swelled with jealousy; then turned sick with cold despair. He felt that to stay there longer was torture well-nigh too great for his strength. And yet Bernèz had bidden him wait.

Things, however, could not long go on like this without something happening; and, though what *did* happen was not of much importance in itself, yet it led to more.

It was the evening of the third day after Christophe's interview with Bernèz at the menhir. Easter had brought the Spring with a rush. The apple-tree, trained over the south gable of the farmhouse at Coëtmor, was covering the old grey walls with a sheet of rosy blossoms; those in the orchard were likewise blushing into bloom; and the cherry-trees, which grew on either side of the garden-gate, hung like a snowy bridal veil over Genofa's golden head, as she knelt beside the shady border underneath, carefully plucking a bunch of fragant lilies-of-the-valley to weave a crown for a girl companion, who had died the day before.

So, at least, thought young Count Aymon, as he leant over the wall, and peeped at his pretty foster-sister between the branches; and he caught himself wishing that the aristocratic *partis*, which his mother was always proposing to him and offering to negotiate, were capable of sheltering half as much beauty under the wedding veil, as did this child of the people under the cherry-blossoms.

Pretty Genofa did not see the admiring face which was contemplating her behind the screen, or the colour in her fair cheeks would have been many shades deeper, and the voice which crooned the Breton ditty would scarcely have been so steady and unembarrassed as it was. Very sweet and soft it sounded, mingling with the drowsy humming of the bees in the blossoms overhead; for, though the dead girl had not been a bosom friend, the occupation in which she was engaged naturally brought thoughts of a companion, who, a year ago, had been healthy and happy as herself, and induced a gentle sorrow which suited well with the pathetic words:—

* "The happiest lot from life they bring,
The young whom death takes in the spring.

Ev'n as the rose drops from the spray,
So youth from life doth fall away.

Those who die ere this week is flown
All with fresh flowers shall be strown;

And from those flowers shall soar heaven high,
As from the rose-cup the butterfly."

She paused for a moment to smell the lilies in her hand, and the pause was filled up by the opening warble of a nightingale in the orchard behind the house. The pretty head was bent on one side to listen, with a graceful bird-like movement, and then the soft voice went on again:—

"Jeffik! Jeffik! did you not hear
The nightingale's song so sweet and clear?

* Breton "sône," translated in Tom Taylor's *Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*

The month of May is passing e'en now,
And with it the blossom on the bough.

When this she heard, the gentle maid,
Crosswise her two pale hands she laid :

I will say an *Ave Marie*,
Our Ladye sweet, in honour of thee :

That it may please our God, thy Son,
To look with pity me upon ;

That grace to pass quick me be given,
And wait for those I love in Heaven."

The soft voice trembled a little over the last words, and was silent again.

"Yes, in Heaven," repeated Genofa to herself, very low. "It will be no harm *there*. Poor Fantik is happier where she is. Guillaouik never really loved her, I do believe. He admired others—me, for instance,—more than her, and she did not live to suffer from his slights. Ah, well, they say he is sorry now. Perhaps *he* would be sorry, too, if *I* were to die." She thought of some one who was not Guillaouik, and sighed.

"Why dost thou sigh, Genofa?" asked a voice at the garden-gate.

The girl started, and looked up, to see young Aymon de Kerdec'h open it and come to her side.

With one bound, she was on her feet, dropping him the pretty *révérence* her mother had taught her.

He doffed his hat and bowed to her, half in mimicry, half in admiring courtesy; and Genofa could not help

thinking him a gallant figure in his black velvet riding-dress, bending his bright handsome head in greeting to her. Here was someone, at least, and that a somebody of importance, who found her not to be despised.

The sense of this was balm to little Genofa, and she smiled on him in return.

"That's right; a smile suits thee better than a sigh, sweet sister," said Aymon, gayly. "But come, tell me, what was the sigh about just now? It wasn't for *me*, was it, pretty one?"

"For *you*, Monsieur Aymon?"

The little head went up, half inquiringly, half with maiden pride, at the question.

"Ay, for me. But perhaps you good people here don't know—nay, how should you?—that I'm going away again. Ah! heaven, it grows harder and harder to go each time!"

He said the last words in a lower voice, with a tender sigh, and a soft glance of his dark eyes at Genofa, which made her lower her silken lashes.

"Is it, Monsieur Aymon?"

She said it simply, because she was at a loss for a reply; and certainly was not prepared to have her hand taken by the young aristocrat, or to hear the glib torrent of words in the same strain that followed.

"*Is it*, Genofa? Dost need to ask the question, pretty one? Ay, truly, it is; and for what, dost think? What makes it so hard? Nay, don't pretend not to know, sweet

hypocrite. But there, 'twould be harder still if I did not have the hope of a speedy return, and a sweet welcome from a sweet maid, of whose golden hair, blue eyes, and rose-bud mouth, I shall dream——"

"Monsieur le Comte!"

Having arrived at this point, Genofa seemed to think that she had allowed her aristocratic admirer to go far enough; so she withdrew her hand and drew herself up with a bewitchingly haughty air.

"Monsieur le Comte, indeed!" he returned, in a slightly nettled tone. "Since when am I that, Mademoiselle? Nay, if you don't take care, I shall call you Madame la Comtesse, for you're acting the *grande dame* with a vengeance. But come, little foster-sister, don't let us quarrel on our last night. Think, I may have to join the army before we meet again; those who love Church and King are mustering at Jalès in the Cevennes. There may be fighting ere long. Sweetest Genofa,"—he possessed himself of her hand again, and bent his handsome head lower than before—"wilt thou not think of me sometimes, when——"

A step came round the corner, and a hand was laid on the garden-gate. The young Count stopped abruptly, and dropped the hand he was holding. The girl drew back and blushed scarlet; for there stood Christophe, in his working clothes, looking as black as night. For some moments he stood looking at them, and they stood looking

away—the girl, with the lilies half fallen at her feet, and her face all aglow with vexed embarrassment; the youth, with his beaver awry, and a look of "caught" plainly written on his boyish features; and never a word spake they.

The evening sun fell aslant through the cherry-trees upon the three figures; upon the beds of old-fashioned spring flowers and homely herbs and vegetables; upon the grey gable of the old farm-house, where the apple-blossoms grew. A breath of air stirred the cherry-boughs, and brought down a shower of snowy petals on the three heads. The nightingale again struck up in the orchard hard by:—

"Jeffik! Jeffik! did you not hear
The nightingale's song so sweet and clear?"

Christophe heard it, and it seemed to break the spell which held him silent and rooted to the ground. He opened the gate quickly, and pushed his way rudely between the two, who still stood on the path, brushing the rest of the lilies from Genofa's hand as he did so.

"How now, fellow? Look to your manners!" exclaimed the young aristocrat, blazing up in sudden wrath, and laying his hand on his sword; but Christophe went on his way without minding. Suddenly, just before reaching the house, he wheeled round.

"Genofa!"—he called back, in a rough voice—

"what are you doing out there? Come in, and mind the house." Having said this, he disappeared in the doorway.

"Hey-day! I must teach that lad how to behave!" exclaimed Count Aymon, angrily. "Such insolence! By my faith, I've a good mind to go and have it out with him at once. He presumes too much on ——"

Genofa stopped him. She was trembling all over.

"No, no," she said. "You must not! Oh, *do* go away, Monsieur Aymon. Indeed, I can't stop any longer! Mother will want me! Good-bye."

She dropped a little hurried courtesy, and fled away before he had time to say another word; and Aymon de Kerdec'h had no choice but to go, muttering things respecting his foster-brother, meanwhile, which are better not recorded.

As for Genofa, she went into the kitchen in a state of great trepidation: vexation, shame, and contrition, all contributing to make up the sum-total of her discomfort. She had meant no harm; but what must he not have thought? The question brought the blushes to her cheeks and the tears to her eyes.

To add to her confusion, the kitchen was empty but of Christophe himself, who was standing before the fire with his back to her. She would have withdrawn; but he heard her step, came to her with a sudden stride, and caught her by the arm.

"Listen here, Genofa," he said, sternly. "Don't let

me catch you playing at love again with the young Seigneur, or I shall think it my duty to speak to your father."

The stern words, the rough movement, angered Genofa. She shook herself free from his grasp.

"Let me alone!" she said, pettishly. "What does it matter to *you* what I do?"

"To me?" He repeated her words in a curious tone, and his face altered.

"Yes; to you!" she returned, bitterly. "It's nothing to you."

"Nothing? Oh, Genofa!"

But the girl was exasperated. She thought he was mocking her, and she did not notice the sorrow in his voice.

"Yes, I tell you," she burst out, with a stamp of her foot. "And I won't have you repeating my words like that. You're nothing to me, if I'm nothing to you; and you've no right to take me to task. *Now*, will you stand out of the way?"—for he had placed himself unconsciously between her and the door.

He moved without a word; and the girl ran back into the garden, and hid herself among the bushes in a passion of weeping.

But the nightingale sang on overhead:—

"Jeffik! Jeffik! did you not hear
The nightingale's song so sweet and clear?

The happiest lot from life they bring,
The young whom death takes in the spring."

And the girl, who was so young and so fair, flung herself on the grass and sobbed : " Oh, God ! that I could die ! that I could die !"

CHAPTER XIII.

"IF THOU DIDST BUT KNOW!"

"Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threats the white!"
—R. BROWNING.

"YOU'RE nothing to me, if I'm nothing to you!" The words went through him like a knife. He did not guess at the complicated emotions, struggling in the girl's heart, which prompted them. The "*if*"—that little word which might have given him the key to the riddle—was quite unnoticed by him.

"You're nothing to me, and I'm nothing to you!"—that was how he read them. Even the brotherhood—the tie which had bound them from infancy—seemed to him repudiated by her in her elation at the admiration she was exciting.

"I shall call you Madame la Comtesse——"

The words, spoken in a slightly raised voice by the young Count, had reached his ear on his way to the

garden-gate, and filled him with alarm. The hope of being a "*grande dame*" must, he thought, be irresistable to the country girl, and the least opposition insupportable to her. Yet, was it not merely a glittering bait to tempt her on to ruin? Would an aristocrat ever stoop to raise a peasant maiden to the position of his bride? Christophe had heard a good deal about aristocrats, not greatly to their credit, when in the company of his pillawer father, and he knew at least that the pride of the French nobility of his day would revolt at the idea of mingling their blue blood with any from a plebeian source.

No, Genofa would only be deceived. He must guard her, even from herself, though he *were* nothing to her.

"Nothing—nothing! Oh, why—*why* had she said that? It was bad enough to have to renounce her tacitly, but to be so cruelly thrown off by her! oh, it was *too* much!" And the lad went about bearing a burden of double the misery of before.

He did not see that Genofa was nearly as wretched. Yet the girl was regretting the foolish "playing at love," for she looked upon it as nothing more. She was brooding over the unkind words she had spoken to Christophe—to Christophe, who had saved her life at the risk of his own —till remorse became more than she could bear. She had never even thanked him for his timely aid. Poor Christophe! whatever he had done to her, she had certainly not used him well. How ungrateful he must

think her? Then she took to watching him timidly. She saw the wretchedness in his face, and her heart melted.

"Poor lad," she thought, "surely his lot is hard enough; he has few enough friends without his little foster-sister withdrawing from the number. No, I will not be unkind to him, even though he should never think of me otherwise than as the silliest of little sisters. At least he shall not think I am *quite* ungrateful for what he did on Easter morning"

It took a good deal of courage on the part of poor little Genofa to make her *amende* to Christophe in his present mood. He was so dark, so stern, so silent, that she felt quite afraid of him. And the childish heart went pit-a-pat, as she made her way up to him one day when he was chopping faggots in the wood-yard.

"Christophe!"——

The ringing blows of his axe had prevented him from hearing her approach, and she was quite close behind him before he discovered her presence. At the sound of his own name, the lad turned, and the colour rushed to his brow when he saw who the speaker was.

"Christophe!" said the girl, speaking very fast, "I wanted to thank you for what you did the other night. I have never thanked you yet, and yet you saved my life. It was *very* good of you."

"Good!"

He repeated the word mechanically, and stood looking at her with his eyes full of a dumb pain which could not express itself. He had saved her life that night, because it was more to him than his own, and she called him *good!* If it had been poor Madame Pouldu now, perhaps; but Genofa——

"Yes," she continued, resuming her speech, which was evidently conned for the occasion, in the same hurried way as before,—"it was very good of you, for you might have been drowned, you know. I must have seemed very ungrateful, but I am not, *really*. And Christophe——"

She stopped, for breath, or something else, failed her.

"Yes."

"Christophe, I *am* sorry!" The words came out with a sort of gulp.

"Sorry for what?"

"Oh, about the other night—for what I said; it was so rude and cross; only I thought you had no right——"

"No."

He paused a moment, then made an effort, and took her hands kindly, in brotherly fashion. For the child's own sake, he must not miss the opportunity.

"Genofa, little foster-sister, I *have* no right, I know. But we have been brought up together, and have been nursed by the same mother. Wilt promise me to be more careful with our young Seigneur? He may speak 'fair

enough, Genofa, and mean no harm; but aristocrats do not mate with peasants; remember that, little foster-sister, and don't let thy innocent heart be entangled. Oh, Genofa, if——!"

She crimsoned like a rose in June, and drew her hands from his.

"Stop, Christophe," she said, with heaving bosom,—"don't say any more; there is no need. Indeed, I don't care for Monsieur—not *like that*."

The lad drew a deep breath of relief, and his face lighted. He glanced at Genofa; then took to studying the chips scattered at his feet.

"That's right," he said; then continued very slowly, as though fearing to tread on dangerous ground:—"But, little foster-sister, if thou dost not really care for him *like that*, why play at it? I think a maiden's love is too beautiful a thing to pretend, and *he* might take it as real, and care too much, and—and——"

He stopped in great confusion.

She flushed more vividly than before, and felt inclined to be angry again. What business had *he* to school her like this? Why should *he* mind whether the young Count cared or not? If she could not have the real thing (and whose fault was that?) why shouldn't she amuse herself a little? She gave her head a little toss.

"Nonsense," she said, "there's nothing in it, I tell you. Why should *you* trouble yourself about it?"

Having said this, she started at the effect of her light words. He looked up with all his face in a quiver.

"Why should *I* trouble myself about it?" he exclaimed, passionately. "Oh, Genofa; if thou didst but know!"

"What?"

She said it very softly, very shyly, for he had looked at her as he had done on Easter Eve; and again at that moment came the instinctive conviction of what was hidden in his heart for her.

How lovely she looked! Her golden head bowed beneath his look, and glinting like gold itself in the twinkling sunbeams which filtered through the fig-tree overhead; her sweet face flushed like a rose-leaf, and a soft smile hovering about the corners of her pretty little mouth. The little brown hands were playing with the corner of her apron, and the folds of her full white bodice rose and fell with the beating of her heart.

"What?" she repeated with a soft, shy, upward glance of the bright, blue eyes, which fell again immediately as they lighted on the passion of his face. No wonder the lad forgot for a moment—forgot his dedication. He seized her hands again in a hot, trembling grasp.

"If thou didst but know how *I* cared! Genofa, I cannot bear to see it. If only for my sake——"

He stopped, and dropped her hands; for, like a chilling wind, the remembrance swept over him that he had nothing

to give in return for what he was asking. For a moment there was an awkward pause; then he resumed, with all the passion gone from voice and look:—

"I would say, for thy father's and mother's sake—for the sake of the old days when we were children together—be careful, my sister. I may at least call thee that, though perhaps there also thou wilt say I have no right."

He sighed as he spoke, and took up his axe again.

The girl shivered a little; she, too, had felt the sudden chill. Half involuntarily she glanced up to see if the wind had risen; but the broad leaves of the fig tree hung motionless in the heat; all was still and sunny as before. It was nothing outward that had changed.

"Oh, don't be alarmed," she said, with affected carelessness; "I can take care of myself."

"At least thou wilt forgive me?"

The dark eyes looked so sad, so pleading, that she *could* not be angry. A little smile again rippled her face, almost in spite of herself.

"Oh, yes, Christophe," she said lightly, "I know it is all for my good."

With that he resumed his work, and she returned to the house, wondering in herself, did he love her, or did he not? Surely she could not have been mistaken a second time. Surely his face could not so belie his heart. And yet, if he did, why this hesitation? Here was a mystery to exercise a maiden's heart.

"*He* should not pretend either," thought little Genofa, with a smile to herself; "the only difference is that he pretends he *doesn't!*"

CHAPTER XIV

SWEET SEDUCTIONS.

"Al my heart
Went after her with longing :
* * * * *
For all her longing and her will
Was toward me.

TENNYSON—"*The Holy Grail.*"

THUS the little quarrel was made up, and the two became friends again.

Poor Christophe settled his mind, as he thought firmly, to be nothing more—to draw the line at the friendly intercourse of brother and sister, and go no further. But such a resolution was not easy to maintain where Genofa was concerned.

After due consideration, the girl flattered herself that she had found a most satisfactory clue to Christophe's contradictory conduct. He *did* love her (her woman's instinct made her feel almost sure of that, and her own inclinations made her still surer), but he was afraid. Poverty and want of family connexions made him shy of aspiring to the hand of an heiress—for so Genofa, being now the only child of well-to-do parents, was considered in the village.

"I must encourage him a little, just a little," thought the maiden, "or he will never get so far as to call in the tailor." *

Accordingly she did "encourage him just a little," but in so charming a way that "the little" was all too much for the poor lad's strength of mind.

It was in the spring time; the blossom was on the bough, the sun shone, birds were pairing, and rustic lovers whispering under the hawthorn in the twilight hour. What wonder if, as the sunny days slid by, that winter night, and its dark deed under the menhir of Saint-Samson, retired further and further into the background of the lad's mind? What wonder if the promise which pledged him to a life of celibacy and self-denial grew to appear of doubtful necessity; especially as no public vow bound him as yet, and the time went on without a word from Bernèz?

Yet he still held out, though the resistance grew daily weaker, as Genofa gradually drove every other idea from his mind, enthroning her sweet image in his heart, like a Madonna in the shrine of a votary.

"I have not committed myself, I have said no compromising word," he kept saying to himself, after every meeting with the maiden of his thoughts, when the delight of being alone in each other's society had been joy sufficient for either. "So long as I do not betray myself

* The tailor is the match-maker in Brittany.

and not go too far, surely, surely it can do no harm just to look at her sweet face and hear her soft voice! Ah, heaven! it will soon be forbidden to me even to do that. Good God! why should I be shut out from the joys which are open to other men? Why should *I* be called upon to make atonement for my father's sin? Oh, it is hard, hard!"

And with these thoughts in his heart, he would press his hands together in impatient bitterness against the hardness of his fate, till, in Genofa's sweet companionship, he again half forgot the cloud which rested upon his life.

"To-morrow is the first of the June fêtes,* Christophe!" said Genofa one evening; as, drawn by the magnet of her presence, he had passed the well, as he came home from work—though by no means the most direct road—hoping to find her there, and enjoy the bliss of carrying her buckets.

"It is going to be a lovely day, I'm sure of that. Thou wilt be there, of course?"

"I do not know," answered the lad, wistfully. "I may be kept late at work."

"Fie, then! Nobody works after three o'clock on the June fêtes. Of *course* thou'lt be there, when I tell thee." She gave him an arch glance, as they stepped along in the chequered shade of the over-arching trees, he bearing

* A very ancient Breton festival, probably a relic of the old Midsummer rites of Druidical ages. It is celebrated every Saturday afternoon in June in some parts of the province.

the water-buckets, she with a brown earthenware pitcher poised on her graceful head. "Of course thou'lt be there; I'll may be have thee for a partner, and let thee place a wheat ear beside my flower. There!"

She smiled so charmingly that the lad could not say "No."

"I'll see," he thought; "the June fêtes are dangerous, I know; but then I can be careful, and Heaven knows where I may be next June!"

CHAPTER XV.

A BOUQUET OF FLAX AND A WHEAT EAR.

"I will, I must, these weary fetters break—
I will be free, if only for her sake."
JEAN INGELOW—"*The Four Bridges.*

"LOVES me—loves me not—loves me!" Genofa leaned against the grey stone lintel of her father's door, with a daisy in her hands, trying the old, old charm.

A pretty picture she made, as she stood there in the June sunshine with the cool tones of the granite behind her, the vivid green of a creeping vine fluttering above, and the landscape, aflush with the beauty of midsummer, spread out before her. On the golden brown of the steep thatched roof, the pigeons basked and coo'd; the air was drowsy with the hum of bees, and fragrant with the scents of meadow-sweet and hawthorn. The little garden was a-blaze with colour — dark-hued, heavy-headed peonies; daisies, red and white; yellow marigolds, and pink columbine; wall-flowers, blending in sweetness all the colours of the sunset—these, and many another old-world flower jostled each other pell-mell in the beds, an embarrassment of brilliant beauty to the bright-winged

butterflies which hovered among them. And Genofa herself was well worthy of this brilliant setting.

A fair-hued flower she looked herself, in her fête-day costume,—her white apron and full white chemisette, her black velvet bodice, with its rows of coloured embroidery, little bouquet of blue flax-blossoms, and silver cross flashing in the sunshine; her full black skirts, under whose blue and scarlet hems peeped her slender crossed ankles and bright-buckled shoes.

The vine-leaves cast chequered shadows on the high white cap which crowned her golden hair, and across her fair face passed the swift-changing thought-shadows, as she bent it over the daisy in deep absorption.

It was the day of the first June fête, and she was waiting for Christophe to come and escort her to the Korigans' Town, as they called the largest cluster of Druid stones on Carnac plain, where the feast was always held by the inhabitants of that neighbourhood.

The other lads and lasses were trooping past down the lane; she heard their gay voices as she stood and waited, and still Christophe did not come home from his work in the fields. She knew he had leave to stop with the rest, for no one was obliged to go on working after three o'clock on any Saturday in June. Why, then, did he not come?

Genofa's heart sank within her. The doubts, which her ingenious theory could not always dispel, rose black and

cold. Did he care for her after all—*like that?* If so, why did he hesitate to lead her, as his favourite maiden, to the dance? She knew that a young man's selection of a girl as his partner for the June fêtes was generally considered to mean something. Did he not wish to show that meaning with respect to her? Was the inward preference, of which it was looked on as the outward sign, not there? Did he, perhaps, prefer some one else—Yvonne, perhaps?

A pain shot through the girl's heart at the thought, and memory brought up the faint blush, the start, with which Yvonne had sometimes met him, and the air of confidence and *bien-être* with which she had observed that Christophe was wont to chat with her cousin. Yes, he had generally more words, when they met, for Yvonne than for her; he seemed less constrained in her presence. *Could* it be that *she* was the chosen one, after all?

In an agony of doubt, Genofa had seized on a daisy from the grass at her feet, and began to despoil it of its pink-tipped petals.

"Loves me—loves me not—loves me —— If he doesn't come before I have finished, I *know* it will be 'loves me not.' Ah, Holy Virgin! what shall I do?—there is only another row! Loves me not—loves me —— Ah, heavens! Christophe, what a start thou'st given me!"

She turned with a low cry and dropped the daisy, on which one silver zone still guarded the golden eye. The lad had come through the house behind her, and had

paused to listen to the girl's innocent conjuring. It was spoken half aloud, and he had overheard in part. A thrill of delight had gone through him as he seized the clue to her thoughts.

"For surely it is *I*," he thought, "for she is waiting for *me*. Good heavens! Does she really love me, then, so much?"

In his great joy he forgot all obstacles, and put his hand lightly on her shoulder, and then she started round with a low cry, her face all a-glow.

"So thou hast come at last," she said, feigning indignation, to hide her confusion. "A pretty time thou hast kept me waiting, sir! I've a mind not to go, after all!"

"Not go!"

He had come back almost resolved on avoiding the danger, and feigning business as an excuse for not escorting his foster-sister to the June Feast; but now resolution was cast to the winds, and he was struck with consternation at the idea of missing it.

"Not go! Oh, yes, Genofa, *do* go. See, I'll be ready in a minute; thou wilt hardly be able to count sixty before I am down again."

He rushed up to his loft, and was down again in a twinkling, his dark face a-glow with haste, his tall, well-knit form looking splendidly picturesque in the fête-day garments which Ninorc'h's tender affection had provided.

Genofa glanced at him with pride, as they walked together down the lane towards the Korigans' Town, and thought that none of the lads at the fête would become the gold-embroidered jacket so well, or look so brightly handsome under the broad-brimmed, silver-buckled beaver, with its velvet band and long fluttering ends.

For to-day Christophe did, indeed, look bright. The cloud which brooded so often over his handsome face had lifted, and given place to a smile; a change seemed to have passed over his whole appearance.

"She loves me—loves me!" this was the tune to which he walked so lightly over the turf-grown path. "And since she loves me, am I not right to consider her first? I am not bound yet—not really. Will not love absolve and be an excuse for all?"

So his heart spoke, and with a sigh of relief he threw off bit and curb and bridle with which he had been restraining himself, and decided to let himself go as love and chance might lead him.

"She shall decide," he thought. "If she loves me enough to have me, and her parents consent—well, then, why not take the happiness the saints bring? Bernèz has forgotten me—that is plain."

So he smiled on his pretty companion, and sang gay snatches of song, and was blithe as the thrush which warbled to his mate in the hawthorn-bowered hedgerow.

"Christophe, my friend, thou hast got no wheat-ears;

how wilt thou make thy offering?" said Genofa, presently, to the excited boy by her side. "See, here is a gate in the hedge, and—yes, I do declare—a corn-field within, just handy. Go and pluck them quick."

"No; do thou pluck them, Genofa; 'twill bring luck."

She went into the field, and he stood leaning over the gate, watching her. He was uplifted as with wine, and scarce knew where he was. He, the poor outcast, seemed living in a *sône*.

Genofa came out of the corn-field, holding six green wheat ears in her hand.

"Now, my friend, thy hat," she said. "See, I will fasten them in, and that will bring more luck still."

He took the beaver from his head, and stood with the sun upon his jet-black locks. Thought Genofa, "Will they choose him for the *Parron*† this year? Surely there is no lad among them so handsome as he!"

"Come," she said aloud, "they must not choose the Parron without us. Let us be quick, or the play will have begun." So they stepped on together, under the whitened hedges, and out on to the wide free space of Carnac Plain.

How springy the turf felt under their light, hurrying feet; how winged was the breeze which brushed past their faces; how mad with joy the larks which carolled in the air! All seemed to Christophe to be keeping the

† The leader of the June Fêtes.

June fête together, and such a fête as had never been before. They passed one or two other belated couples, hurrying along in the same direction, and one or two stray youths and stray maidens coming alone, who had not yet found their partners. Was Yvonne one of the latter?

Genofa half thought she recognised her cousin, walking alone across the plain at some yards' distance from them; but she turned away her head and would not look, chattering away more gaily to Christophe, that he also might not look. She had not yet got over that sudden pang of jealous doubt, though Christophe *was* by her side, more lover-like than she had ever known him.

And so they arrived at the Korigans' Town. This was a labyrinth of dolmans and menhirs situated on another part of the plain from that where Christophe and Bernèz had had their interview, so that there was nothing to remind him too rudely of the distasteful subject there discussed. Nor was there anything in time and scene to bring the moment unpleasantly before him.

Then, the twilight had been over the plain; the solemn hues of evening had been on earth and sky; menhir and dolman had risen, dark and shrouded, and solitary, among the shades; the scene had been still as a church, and unpeopled save by himself and the pale, stern priest.

Now, the sun rose high in the stainless blue; the plain was flooded with yellow light, and alive with gaily-dressed groups of youths and maidens; the whole

unmarried population, indeed, for miles around, between the ages of the riper teens and the earlier tens, had gathered there to dance and make merry together.

The air rang with laugh and jest; and dolman and menhir stood among the merriment like ghosts robbed of all terror, who, by some mistake, have forgotten quite to vanish at cock-crow.

A crowd of both sexes had assembled around a hugh altar-like dolman which stood in the centre of the circle. Before it stood the son of Antonn Comorre's brother, a handsome youth of two or three-and-twenty, from the neighbouring town of Auray, holding by the hand a buxom damsel, several years older than himself, who, as report said, would shortly become his bride. By the knot of blue, green, and white ribbons, which he wore in his button-hole, any Breton would at once have recognised him as the parron, or master of last June, while his partner's silver ring proclaimed her as the past mistress.

His was the right of electing his successor, and a crowd of the best-looking and most active of the young men were trying to attract his notice, while the maidens were pressing him to make a choice, that the sport might at once begin. But, as it seemed, he was laughingly denying them all, and, though keeping the crowd in good humour with jest and compliment, kept looking over his shoulder in the direction of Carnac village, as though awaiting the arrival of someone expected. No sooner did he

perceive Christophe and Genofa than, unpinning his badge of office, he came towards them, and, bowing low, said, in a tone of mock solemnity :—

"If it p'ease you, ladies and gentlemen, to approve my choice, I hereby name Christophe of the Menhir as parron of this year's fêtes. Have I your consent?"

He held up the knot of ribbons, which fluttered in the the thyme-scented air, and looked towards the crowd.

There was a thrill of some surprise. Some of the youths looked discontented, some of the maidens supercilious at this elevation of the pillawer's son to the place of honour over them; but Christophe's prowess at wrestling and single-stick had won for him a sort of respect, and young Comorre was, besides, such a general favourite that none liked to dispute his choice. Moreover, of Christophe's good looks and excellent dancing—indispensable qualities for every parron—there could be no doubt; and, therefore, no open dissatisfaction was shown, though the acclamations which greeted the new master were less hearty than usual.

Young Comorre observed it, and to cover the lack of warmth, uttered so many *bon mots*, as, in spite Christophe's resistance, he pinned the ribbons in his button-hole, that the by-standers were soon in renewed good-humour.

"There, little cousin," whispered the young man aside to Genofa,—"that's for *thy* sweet sake; for I know full

well who'll be mistress. Don't tell Marie, here, or she'll be jealous!"

Christophe had flushed crimson at his unexpected election; and, keenly sensitive to the general feeling, had begun by opposing himself to it; but a look and a word from Genofa stopped him.

A mark for every eye, he stood awkwardly in the midst of the gay throng, longing to retire into private life, and leave his honours to a more popular candidate, but unable to do so on account of the pretty maiden, who he knew was so ready to share them.

"Come, lad," said young Comorre, slapping him good-humouredly on the shoulder,—"don't act *Jean le Veau*.* Choose the mistress, and let us get the ceremonies over and begin the dance. *Vertuz*,† my feet are itching to be at it!"

The past mistress, with a sigh, drew off her silver ring, and Christophe, blushing all over his dark face, immediately placed it on Genofa's slender finger, upon which the cheers which had been wanting in warmth at his own election, immediately broke out with added heartiness. Genofa Comorre was so fully recognised as a beauty throughout the whole bishopric, that few maidens in the assembly could consider her election as any slight to themselves; and as for the lads, one and all admired her—they could not help it!

* An imbecile. † A Breton exclamation.

Then, the new master and mistress of the revels having been chosen, the *binons* struck up a prelude, and the time-honoured song of the June Feast began. First, last year's parron sang to his partner a little greeting and assurance of his constant true love, she replying coquettishly by telling him that he was quite free to take back his heart with the silver ring if so it pleased him; upon which he described his feelings as shadowed forth by the ribbons of his badge :—*

"The green ribbon in honour of my gossip fair I wore,
For true and tender was the love in my heart for her I bore.

The white ribbon I wore in the eye of day to show
A token of the spotless love that was betwixt us two.

The blue ribbon I wore to mark that at peace with her I'd be:
And ever as I look at it my sighs fall heavilie."

Here young Comorre heaved such a tremendous sigh and cast up his eyes so pathetically, that the whole party was convulsed with laughter; and to the closing couplet of his song his buxom maiden at once gave the lie by tucking her arm confidentially within his, and joining in the merriment evoked by his sad—

"I'm left alone, now she is flown, alack, and well-a-day!
As the wanton little pigeon from the old cote flies away."

(But that's not thee, Mac'haidik, the saints be thanked!)

* "Ballads and Songs of Brittany."

concluded the merry fellow, with a proud look at his partner, who smiled confidingly in return.

"Now, Christophe," said young Comorre, encouragingly.

The Child of the Menhir held back, but the other youths pushed him forward, and he was fain to begin his song to the sharer of his dignities.

It had all been composed long before, and was the conventional greeting used on the occasion of every June feast; yet the lad blushed and faltered over it, as though it had been composed by himself, on purpose to express his feelings for the lovely girl who stood before him, flushing and sparkling with pleasure at her election :—

"Then come away, my sweetheart, come walk the woods with me,
We will hear the winds a-rustle in the branches of the tree;
And the waters of the streamlet the pebbles murmuring o'er,
And the birds in the tall tree-tops that their merry music pour," &c., &c.

No sooner was the singing over, than every lad sought out the girl he liked best, and the couples filed up, two and two, to the great dolman to make their June offerings.

A relic this, no doubt, of the old heathen rites of midsummer; but, good Catholics as the Bretons are, many such observances remain, testifying to the old religion of their Celtic ancestors, still clung to with all the tenacity of their race.

Upon the Druid altar, each maiden, who favoured her partner sufficiently, laid the bunch of flax-blossoms which all wore in their bodices; and her swain then placed by it a green wheat-ear from his beaver. If these remained unwithered at the close of the evening, it was a happy omen that man and maid would be faithful to each other. Christophe and Genofa went through the ceremony with the rest; but for them, at least, it had a grave significance.

The girl laid down the little blue bouquet from her breast, in a soft flutter of content; stealing a look at her partner, as she did so, to see how he was taking it. Very seriously it seemed to be, if she might judge from the intense look on the dark face, the flush on his cheek, and the firm, set lips. His hand trembled, as he took off his hat and detached one of the wheat-ears she had given him; and his colour waned, leaving him white under the sun-tan, as he placed the green by the blue.

Did there flash before him at that instant another offering, made by another Druid stone, an offering which should have left him naught to offer now?

Some such cause there must have been to account for the strange expression — a look almost of fear — which passed across his face, as he completed the action. Genofa saw it, and grew pale also. So superstitious was the child, that such a look at such a time made her shudder, as at an omen baneful to their love.

For one moment she stared at her partner, her blue eyes wide with a nameless terror; then the binons struck up and the new master and mistress were called upon to lead the *jabadaŏ*.

At the first sound of the Breton bag-pipes, Christophe started; the look on his face changed to one of bold defiance, and he seized his partner and whirled her off at the head of the dancers, in a mad round which left not a moment for thought.

This first dance was a long one. The pipers played till they were out of breath, and the couples were slow to leave the ring. The new master and mistress were the last on the ground, and not till the musicians had paused from sheer exhaustion did Christophe draw his pretty partner aside to rest.

Pretty, indeed, she looked; her fair cheeks flushed with exertion to the hue of a monthly-rose; her eyes sparkling with excitement, her golden locks falling from beneath her snow-white coif, the sport of every soft air which breathed across the plain.

Many an admiring look was cast on Antonn Comorre's daughter, as she stood by her partner's side, leaning against a menhir, her pretty feet crossed at the ankles beneath the many-coloured hems* of her tier of petticoats, whose number showed that she was well-dowered in

* The wealth of a Breton girl may be guessed from the number of hems to her petticoats.

goods as well as in beauty; and many a lad felt a jealous twinge under his embroidered vest, as he saw how well-pleased the little rustic belle seemed with her handsome partner.

She might have had twenty others for the next dance; but she shook her pretty head, as the lads came crowding up, and assured them that the next and yet the next were promised to Christophe. Nor would she bind herself to dance with any, her cousin, young Comorre, only excepted, till later on in the evening.

There were some envious ones who remarked that the favoured swain did not look so light-hearted as he should under so marked a preference. And, indeed, as he leant there against the tall grey stone, in spite of having the prettiest girl by his side, the cloudless blue overhead, and the flowery turf beneath his feet; in spite of the jubilant songs of the larks, and the flood of sunshine all around, there was something in his face not quite to match.

"What is it, Christophe? Thou art grave!" said Genofa, presently, half anxious, half reproachful, as she looked up in his handsome face. "Wouldst perhaps like another partner for a change?"

"Another partner! The saints forbid!" was his vehement answer; and the look which accompanied it quite satisfied Genofa as to its truth. Yet there was a wildness about him, as he seized her and whirled her off

again at the first sound of the binons, which half frightened the pretty child.

What possessed Christophe this evening? She had never seen him like this before: now grave, now gay, with a mad gaiety which kept him moving through the mazes of the dance, till the other couples clapped their hands at the tireless agility of their new parron. Then what burning looks he cast at her: what defiance there was in his handsome eyes for every other lad who approached her. What had come over him?

CHAPTER XVI.

"THINE, BODY AND SOUL"

"Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought,
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought—

"Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands."

* * * *

"Heart, shall we live or die?
The rest . . . . settle it by-and-by!"

—R. BROWNING.

"I AM tired. Wouldst like to dance with Yvonne?"

Genofa said this, and looked provingly at Christophe, as the binons struck up for the twelfth time, and the couples moved to their places. She had seen the covert way in which her cousin watched him; she had seen how once, when she was dancing with young Comorre, Yvonne and Christophe had stood out from the circle and talked together; and her jealousy stirred again.

"No, I will not dance with Yvonne; she has already had her turn from me this evening," answered Christophe, carelessly. "See, she is going to dance with little Houarn, the tailor. But thou art tired?" He looked

tenderly down at the flower-like head, which was drooping a little. "Poor little white dove, I've been too hard on thee! Have I *quite* danced thee off thy feet, Genofa?"

The colour, which had paled a little, flushed her cheeks once more under the tender look, the caressing words.

"No, Christophe, no," she answered, almost timidly. "Only let me rest a bit, and then we will dance again. Heavens! was there ever such a June Feast before?"

"Never!" he answered, fervently. "I did not care much about June before this year, Genofa: but then I have been away so long, and before that——"

"Yes, before that we were only children," she said quickly, taking the words out of his mouth—"we were only children, and did not come to the June Feasts; and we did not know——"

She paused and reddened.

"What?"

He had slipt his arm through hers, and was bending over her, as they strolled away together over the daisied plain. The heat of the afternoon was over; the sun was sliding down his golden way towards the west: the air was golden; the sun flashed a golden line on the horizon; the flowering blossoms of the broom and whin showed like golden heaps, cast down upon the fine, short turf: and the two walked on in a golden dream.

"What?" He had asked the question, but the answer did not come, and for some moments neither seemed to

care for further speech. The sound of the binons, the gay laughter of the dancers, came to them on the scented air, more and more softened by distance. Other couples were strolling about also, but not near them, or, if they were, they did not see them. Christophe had eyes for nothing but Genofa, and she seemed to be counting the daisies at her feet, as they pressed the pearly stars by hundreds beneath their tread.

"No, we did not know then," he said, presently, as though thinking out aloud a continuation to her speech—"we did not know, and now we do. It is of no use trying to hide it from one another—is it, Genofa?"

Her hand trembled on his arm. She looked up in his face with a startled glance; it seemed as though he were reading her very heart.

There was a melting passion, an intense softness, in the dark face, which made her drop her eyes instantly, and colour to the very edge of her coif.

"We know it, Genofa," he went on, speaking in a low, soft tone, which yet vibrated, as though with some strong feeling he were trying to control; "we both know it, do we not? Say, are we to speak it out to each other, or must I go away? It must be one or the other—I cannot stay here longer, and be dumb!"

There was a ring of pain in the last words which went to her heart; but yet she did not answer at once. She had a nervous feeling that he was going a little too far.

She had encouraged him, it is true; but should he not first have spoken to the tailor, before asking her a question which, perhaps, would need an answer it would be premature for her to give? What would father and mother say, if she, their heiress and only child, were to promise herself away so unceremoniously?

"Must I go away, Genofa?—*must* I?" He was speaking again, and his voice was full of a passionate appeal. "Thou dost not know how sad it is to go where none knows one, to wander where none cares! Oh! Genofa, I have been so alone in the world, so solitary, so unloved I thought——"

His voice broke.

Then timidity gave way, and she strove to answer.

"Oh! Christophe, thou must not leave us. This is thy home, thou knowest."

"But it cannot be my home, Genofa, except on one condition. Child, dost think I'm like the dumb oxen, who are content so long as they have a stall at night and a truss of fodder? Dost think I can see thee every day and be as silent as *they* are? Genofa, it is for thee to decide—*I* cannot choose; things are too strong for me! Say, Genofa, must I go or stay?"

She was frightened at the passion of his words. The calm air of the wide plains seemed to thrill with his voice, low as it was, and speaking for her ear alone. She tried to answer, but could not.

"Then I will go."

He took his arm from hers, looked at her once, and turned away.

But her heart cried out in terror, and she stretched out her hands.

"Christophe! Oh! it is not that—no tthat, but—— Father! Mother!"

It was very inarticulate, but it brought him to her side again. He took hold of her outstretched hands, and looked down into her eyes. "Father and mother, Genofa? Ay, I know; but it is *thou* who must give me the answer. Must I go or stay?"

"Stay!"

She said it very softly; but it was enough. With a cry of exultation he caught her in his arms.

"Then I *will* stay, Genofa. *Thou* hast decided, and I am thine—thine, body and soul!"

She started at the words, even as she stood there with her head on his breast. They seemed to her almost blasphemy; and, indeed, the lad was so carried away by excitement and passion, and the rebound from his late in-curbing, that he scarcely knew what he said.

Thine!

Something in the echo of his own words and the way in which she received them struck him also. He looked up suddenly, started in his turn, and shuddered.

Before them, at the distance but of a few paces,

standing grave and tall against the evening sky, was the great menhir under which Christophe had been found. In their absorption they had drawn near to it unconsciously, and had entered into the great shadow stretching from its feet far across the plain. Christophe gazed at it with eyes distended by a sudden horror.

"Not *thine*, but *mine*," it seemed to say in its silent language.

Genofa followed the direction of her lover's eyes, and she, too, trembled.

To have made their avowal in the shadow of that old relic of the heathen times, seemed to her ill-omened, and especially under *that* menhir.

"A Child of the Menhir!" thus they called him. Was there, indeed, something supernatural about his origin?

The girl looked in her lover's face, and her own grew pale. Christophe saw it, and shook off the misgiving which had suddenly possessed him.

"Well, the die is cast now at all events," he muttered to himself;—"she has decided for me, and I cannot draw back. Come, let me enjoy what fate sends me. Heaven knows I have not had much pleasure in life!" He turned to the girl.

"Sweetheart," he said, gently, "why dost look so pale? Come, let us go back to the dance."

So they went, and in the mad, merry measure, soon

forgot the shadow cast by the great menhir. And at sundown, when the gay gathering broke up, and a purple twilight fell around the Korigans' Town, where (as they say) the little men of underground would soon be dancing in the mortals' footsteps, those two walked home in company, with their handsome heads very near together, holding each other by the heart-finger,* and murmuring soft endearments in the shade of the hawthorn hedges, where the thrushes were singing to their mates.

"Those two will soon be coming to my father, for example," remarked Houarn Kabik, the tailor's son, as he shambled homewards by the side of Yvonne.

The tall, calm maiden had let him walk with her from the merry-making, because she could not resist the pleading of his eyes for this small grace. It was such heaven for the simple, awkward fellow just to be allowed to be beside her. He seldom said anything, and much as his worship irked her, she was weary of ceaseless denials. Yet she would sometimes think a little sorely, why should it be just this little Houarn Kabik who had picked her out for his admiration? If he had not done it, would another? The other lads seemed strangely respectful of his choice, and she felt that it was hard upon her.

* So the Bretons call the ring-finger. For youth and maiden to hold each other by this, means courtship.

"My father will have a little business soon, will he not, Mistress Yvonne?" went on the young tailor, presently, seeing that his companion did not respond.

"Who? What?" asked the girl, starting as from a dream.

"Why, yon couple—Mistress Genofa and Christophe of the Menhir," said Houarn, with more alacrity than usual, pointing to a youth and maiden walking on before them in the far perspective of the flowery lane.

"Genofa and Christophe! Oh, no!" exclaimed the girl, with quick decision.

"And why not?"

"Why?" Oh, it is impossible! My uncle and aunt would never allow it; and, besides, he is as good as dedicated."

For Christophe, in a moment of confidence, had once confided to the sister of Bernèz his thoughts of the priesthood. The hint of it had caused her a momentary shock; it had blown down a tiny castle in the land of hope, which had at one time just trembled before her vision. But she had grown accustomed to the idea, and it had brought her peace. She had watched his ways with Genofa without a pang of jealousy.

"Only the Church will be his bride," she had thought. "They are just like brother and sister, that is all!"

"As good as dedicated?" repeated the little tailor, spending more words on the theme than was usual with

him. "What! will he be a klöarek? Nay, nay, Mistress Yvonne, I am not a traitor's son for nothing; I know better than that!"

She did not reply, and the tall girl and the little man walked on in silence under the snowy hedges. But a sting had been planted in her heart. She watched the couple before her with a new misgiving. Yes, they seemed very different from her and Kabik.

"Can that be the way in which lovers walk?" she thought uneasily. "Can it be possible that—— But no, Christophe would not be false to his vocation."

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS MARRIAGE-MESSENGER.

"Thanks, good friend; sound fruit is sound,
But for your apple nought I care,
Nor for your flower nor for your ear;
All on my dove is set my mind."
"Ballads and Songs of Brittany."

"YVONNE, I want thy help."

It was the next morning. The dew was still on the grass and on the thorn-hedges where the May bloomed thick and white, making the air fragrant, as with the scent of fresh almonds.

Yvonne Guenedon was driving her cow down the lane, meaning to commit her to the care of one of the little herdsmen on the plain. By the last gate stood Christophe, with his scythe over his shoulder, and old Caleb couched at his feet.

Yvonne started a little and the colour came to her face.

"Thou here, Christophe? I did not expect to meet thee here. I thought Uncle Antonn was to begin cutting the seed-meadow to-day?"

"Ay. But I came round this way to see thee.'

"Me?"

"Ay, Yvonne; why not? I want thy help."

"My help? What can I do, Christophe?"

On the instant there flashed on her the meaning looks and words of Houarn Kabik last night. Could it be that? But the idea was painful to the girl, and she put it from her, as human nature is prone to do.

Christophe looked impatient. It seemed to him that his friend and confidant was dull of comprehension this morning. Since his understanding with Genofa, last night, it seemed to him that his meaning was only too plain.

We are all apt to forget that what is all-absorbing, and thus all-transparent to ourselves, is often neither interesting nor plain to others.

"Nay, for sure thou must know, Yvonne; thou must have seen. Oh! Yvonne, thou wilt be my friend, wilt thou not?"

"I *am* thy friend, Christophe!" she answered, simply; then looked at him, and waited.

"And Genofa's?"

She started a little, but still replied: "Yes."

"We will always be grateful to thee, she and I, if only——"

Then it *was* true!

"Oh, Christophe!" burst out the girl, scarcely knowing

what she said. "Oh, Christophe, thou canst not mean it; thou canst not mean that thou and Genofa—"

"Love one another?" he took the words out of her mouth—"Ay, and why not?"

"Why not? But surely thou saidst that thou wert already devoted, hadst already chosen—the Church."

Her words seemed to sting him. He coloured angrily.

"And did I say it was decided? Am I already a Klöarek?"

"No, but—"

"But what? Surely I have a right to change. I have made no vow—at least—" He hesitated. The remembrance of that evening by the menhir returned upon him and made him uneasy.

Yvonne saw his vexation, and checked herself—what right had she to find fault? It was, or ought to be, nothing to her.

"Christophe," she said, gently; "Don't be vexed. Tell me all about it."

Then he told her, and his heart warmed, and the uneasy feeling passed away as he spoke of Genofa.

She heard him to the end, trying her best to keep down the rebellion of her heart. She did not understand it—had no leisure, then, to ask what it meant—yet she felt it was there. But the thought of Bernèz rose, as she listened. What would he, with his exalted ideas, say to this choice of an earthly love in place of

the divine? With what withering scorn she had once heard him speak of a Klöarek who had been false to his vocation! And how disappointed he would be! She knew that his heart had been early set on winning Christophe; she knew how his soul exulted over a recruit gained for the service of the Sanctuary.

"Christophe," she interposed timidly, as he paused for a moment in his praises of Genofa:—"She is all that, I know; but—Bernèz, what will *he* say?"

The lad flushed again uncomfortably.

"What *should* he say?" he exclaimed, with some heat:—"If I find I have mistaken my vocation, there need be no more words from him in the matter. But I see how it is, Yvonne, thou art not willing to help me. It is *very* unkind."

"But I *am* willing," rejoined the girl, her eyes filling with tears:—"It is only—only—but never mind, I will say no more. Come, Christophe, tell me what I must do?"

"Go to father and mother—I mean Genofa's—and break the news to them," he said, somewhat mollified. "Do it this morning, when I am out of the way, and Genofa is sitting with the sick child at Manon Pouldu's. Begin with the mother, and then when the father comes in at noon, the way will be paved, and thou canst tell him quietly without fear of an outcry. And, Yvonne! kind Yvonne! speak for me, wilt thou not? They love

me well, that I know. Still I am but a poor match for Genofa, that I know also. Yet she loves me, she loves me, the bonnie wee thing, and *that* should weigh."

He had begun eagerly, commandingly almost; he ended with a humble tenderness, as he spoke of himself in comparison with her he loved, which seemed infinitely touching to his hearer. She looked at him with a wistful expression in her clear, grey eyes.

"Yes, Christophe, I will do it."

"And you will come to me afterwards in the seed-meadow, and tell me how you have sped?"

"Yes."

"Our Lady bless thee. Thou art a true friend, Yvonne."

He said it gratefully; then, calling his dog, he went off to his work in the seed-meadow. Yet he never paused to look after her as he went.

For some time Yvonne let her cow graze by the roadside, and stood there by the gate, with her arms resting on the top of it, and her forehead resting upon them. She felt stunned and incapable of motion.

"My God! my God!" this was the inarticulate cry of her heart, "I could have given him up to *Thee!*—Thou knowest it; but to *her!*—He will wed, after all, an earthly bride, and I—"—she breathed hard as in bodily pain—"and I? Yes, I must help him; I can do that, and he

must never know, never know, what it costs me. May God bless him, and make him happy in his own way with her he has chosen, and give me strength to help him!"

So the girl prayed in her pain, and her sweet, true, natural unselfishness helped her in that hour. Of shame to herself, in having given her love unsought, the simple peasant girl did not dream. He to whom she had devoted the precious ointment of her heart would none of it; but she did not, therefore, grudge its dedication. She could still pour it out for him in one way, if he would not have it in another.

The cow lowed behind her, tired by the unwonted delay. Yvonne looked up at the sound, sighed a little wearily, and swung the gate open for the animal to pass through. On the plain the little herdsmen were whistling and shouting to each other; larks were singing in the sweet blue air; and bees were humming peacefully and busily in the golden broom-blossoms. All seemed in tune with the joyous freshness of the June morning; yet, as the girl turned homewards, after disposing of her cow, there was a white, still look on her face which would have suited better with the end of life—with snow and sadness, death and winter—than with its beginning—youth and sunshine, song and flowers. A frost had nipped hers full early, poor Yvonne. But she did not lie down and die, for all that; she

was one of those women who can suffer and be strong.

Just as carefully as usual did she fulfil her little daily duties in her grandfather's cottage; just as tenderly did she help the old man to rise and dress; and then, having seated him in his armchair and set on the *pot-au-feu* for dinner, she asked a neighbour to keep an eye on him in case he should want anything, and set off on her errand to the farm.

It was well on in the afternoon before she could seek out Christophe. He was standing knee-deep in the buttercup-studded grass of the seed-meadow, mowing down long ranks of juicy herbage, and did not see her till she was close on him. Then he started, and his lips trembled so that he could scarcely frame the question he was longing to put.

It was the girl who loved him that spoke first; in a calm, clear tone, which surprised even herself when she thought of it afterwards.

"I have told them, Christophe. They were not pleased at first; but they love you, and I think they will give in for your sake and for Genofa's."

This was all she told him. She said nothing of Ninorc'h's tears nor of Antonn's anger on their first reception of her news. She said nothing of her own special pleading, nor of the length of time it was before she could win from them a promise to consider the

matter. She kept the trouble to herself, and only gave him the hard-won fruits.

"Thanks, Yvonne, thanks," he said, with a brightening face as he finished;—"thou art better than any tailor."

This was all the thanks she got. The happy lover went off to find his chosen, and the girl who loved him stole into the silent church and prayed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HALCYON DAYS.

"All in the blue unclouded weather."
TENNYSON—"*Lady of Shalott.*"

ANTONN COMORRE grumbled and fumed a little; Ninorc'h Comorre gloomed and fretted a little. Both agreed that 'twas but a poor match for their heiress; both regretted the pillawer connexion—though of course *that* must be broken off; but both agreed that Christophe was a good lad, and like a son already.

Finally, after watching the devotion of the young people, and submitting to much pretty coaxing from Genofa, they said "yes!" and the two were allowed to go through the ceremony of drinking wine from the same cup, and cutting bread with the same knife, which in Brittany is regarded as a preliminary engagement: Christophe being a "son of the house," (as Antonn said), the more formal interventions of the *Bazvalan** could be dispensed with.

The marriage was to follow after the harvest.

Then began a time of sunshine for the lovers: a time

* The Breton match-maker, and marriage messenger, who is generally the tailor

of wandering in the lanes at twilight, holding each other by the ring-finger; of whispered conversations in the corners of the room; of meetings by the well, and shy kisses in the cool, moist shade of the dairy, or in the orchard behind the gable before the rising of the moon. Every time—in fact, every place—was consecrated by some little sweet remembrance of a love-blossom snatched from among the hours of labour. Only Genofa observed that, unless his work or his duties as parron of the June Feasts took him there, Christophe avoided the plain, and that he always came away from a chance visit to it with a shadow on his brow.

This did not trouble her however, not then; nor did she vex herself to find a reason for it, in those first halcyon days of acknowledged love.

Bluebeard's wife did not trouble herself about the mysterious closet in that first joyous time of her undisputed reign. All was too new and wonderful for that.

They were very happy those two young things. She indeed had been happy always (with little intermissions, which, like the cloud-shadows on a gleamy day, did but enhance the sunshine), and this was like a crown set on it all; or as the unchecked expanding of a bright morning into a golden noon. He had suffered; had known what it is to go loveless and alone; and this sudden happiness was to him like the passing into Paradise from the dark waves of a troublesome world:

it almost intoxicated him. The haunting fears which had pursued him so long; the struggle with himself which had embittered the dawn of his love; the vague uneasiness of conscience which had preceded the decisive words—these were all forgotten in the bright dream whose every vision was of bliss. Genofa was the heroine, the centre of it all. He lived but for Genofa, thought but of her, had eyes for none else; and who, indeed, so worthy of an all-absorbing love? So at least thought the adoring Christophe, as he looked at her beauty, ripening like a peach under the sun of their mutual happiness.

He became a poet in those days, like many another of his poetical race, and composed a *sône* to his love, in which he compared her hair to the golden blossoms of the broom, her eyes to the sky-blue flax-flowers by which she had marked him out as her chosen swain, her lips to the crimson berries of the eglantine, and her face to a wild-rose, blushing in the soft red of the early dawn. It had all been said, no doubt, many a time before, of many another maiden; but what matter. Is not Love, are not his utterances, ever new, though old as the days of Adam and Eve? The spring, with its primroses and violets, is born anew year by year, bringing ever fresh delight; and yet summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, have not failed since the world began.

Genofa found that little *sône* the best and sweetest she

had ever heard, when Christophe repeated it to her one evening behind the gable, when the white roses in the garden-beds looked like veiled moons in the dim twilight, when the stars were twinkling through the leaves of the lime-trees overhead, and the nightingales were calling to their mates. *She* thought it a miracle of composition; so what matter if it were not quite original?

Yes, those were halcyon days for our hero and our heroine; but somehow such days will not bear much description.

Those who have passed such will know all about it for themselves; and those who have not, will, according to these connoisseurs, never be able to understand till their own turn comes.

And this being the case, we may as well bring our chapter to a close.

END OF VOL. II